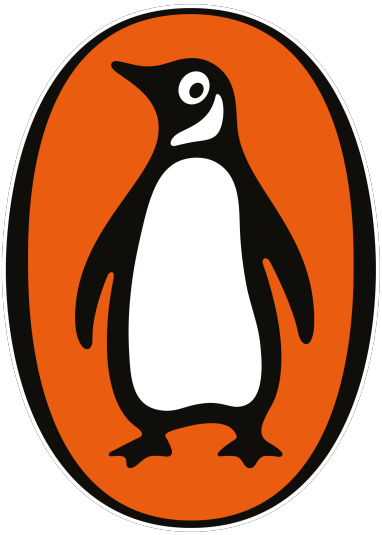
GEORGES
SIMENON
SPECIALITES
Maigret Enjoys Himself
INSPECTOR MAIGRET



Georges Simenon

MAIGRET ENJOYS HIMSELF

Translated by DAVID WATSON

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Georges Simenon was born on 12 February 1903 in Liège, Belgium, and died in 1989 in Lausanne, Switzerland, where he had lived for the latter part of his life. Between 1931 and 1972 he published - seventy-five novels and twenty-eight short stories featuring Inspector Maigret.

Simenon always resisted identifying himself with his famous literary character, but acknowledged that they shared an important characteristic:

> My motto, to the extent that I have one, has been noted often enough, and I've always conformed to it. It's the one I've given to old Maigret, who resembles me in certain points ... 'understand and judge not'.

Penguin is publishing the entire series of Maigret novels.

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‘Simenon ought to be spoken of in the same breath as Camus, Beckett and Kafka’

– *Independent on Sunday*

1. The Inspector at the Window

The little old man with the wisp of a goatee beard was emerging from the shade of the warehouse again, walking backwards, looking left and right and gesturing with both hands as if he were actually drawing the heavy lorry he was directing towards him. His hands were indicating:

'Right a bit ... Stop ... Now straight ahead ... Gently does it ... Left ... Now ... Brake ...'

And the lorry, which was also reversing, lurched clumsily over the pavement and on to the street, where the little man was now signalling to the traffic to stop for a moment.

It was the third lorry in the last half-hour to pull out of that huge entrance with the sign on the front reading: 'Catoire et Potut', words which were very familiar to Maigret, as he had seen them every day for the last thirty years.

He was standing at the window of his apartment in Boulevard Richard-Lenoir, tieless and in shirt-sleeves, puffing slowly on his pipe. Behind him his wife was starting to make the bed.

He wasn't ill, so this scene was quite out of the ordinary, as it was ten o'clock in the morning and not even a Sunday.

Here at his window in the middle of the morning, vaguely observing the comings and goings in the street, the lorries driving in and out of the warehouse opposite, he had a feeling that reminded him of certain days in his childhood, when his mother was still alive and he was off school because he had the flu or it was the end of term. It was the feeling of finding out 'what went on when he

wasn't there'.

It was now the third day – the second if you didn't count Sunday – and a vague sense of unease continued to take the edge off his delight.

He was making all manner of discoveries: his interest was grabbed not only by the movements of the man with the beard who supervised the departure of the lorries, but also, among other things, by the number of customers going into the bistro next door.

It wasn't the first time he had spent the whole day in his apartment, but on the previous occasions it was almost always because he had been ill, and so had been in bed or in his armchair.

On this occasion, he wasn't ill. He simply had nothing to do. He could spend his day as he saw fit. He was learning the rhythms of his wife's routine: how she set about her housework, what time she went into the kitchen or the bedroom and how she moved from one task to another.

He was suddenly reminded of his mother, the way she busied herself around the house while he, even back then, hung around at the window.

And, just like his mother, Madame Maigret said to him:

'Shift to one side. I need to sweep under there.'

There was even the changing smell of cooking; today, the smell was of fricandeau à l'oseille.

Like a child, he had begun to pay attention again to the play of the light, the way the dividing line between sun and shade moved slowly across the pavement and the way certain objects became distorted in the shimmer of a hot summer's day.

There were seventeen more days of this to come.

This had all come about through a series of chance events and coincidences. It had begun in March, when he had suffered a bad bout of bronchitis. He had got out of bed too soon, as always, because the work was piling up at Quai des Orfèvres. He had had to take further sick leave, and for a while then it was feared he had contracted pleurisy.

The coming of fine weather had restored him to health, but he continued to feel worried, irritable, ill at ease. It was as if he had suddenly become an old man, and ill health, the real sort, which diminishes you for the rest of your days, was waiting just around the corner.

He hadn't said anything to his wife, and it got on his nerves when

she would observe him out of the corner of her eye. One evening he had gone to see his friend Pardon, the doctor in Rue Picpus, with whom they usually had dinner once a month.

Pardon had given him a thorough check-up and had even, just to be sure, referred him to a heart specialist.

The medics had found nothing wrong, other than a slightly raised blood pressure, but they were unanimous in their advice:

'You should take a holiday.'

He hadn't had a proper holiday for three years. Every time he had been just about to leave something had cropped up that required his attention; on one occasion he had got as far as his sister-in-law's house in Alsace when, on the first day, he had received a frantic telephone call summoning him back to Paris.

'All right,' he had promised his friend Pardon, grumbling. 'This year I will take a holiday no matter what.'

In June he had settled on a date: 1 August. His wife had written to her sister. The latter, who lived in Colmar with her husband and children, owned a chalet on Col de la Schlucht, a pleasant and relaxing spot, which the Maigrets had often visited.

Alas, Charles, his brother-in-law, had just acquired his new car and had decided to take his family on holiday to Italy.

How many evenings had he and Madame Maigret spent discussing where they might go? First, they had considered the Loire, where Maigret might do some fishing, then the Hôtel des Roches Noires in Les Sables-d'Olonne, where they had spent many a happy holiday. In the end they opted for Les Sables. Madame Maigret had written to the hotel in the last week of June and had received a reply saying that all the rooms were booked until 18 August.

Finally it was sheer chance that forced the inspector's hand. One Saturday evening in the middle of July, at around seven in the evening, he had been called to Gare de Lyon on some routine police matter. It had taken half an hour to get from Quai des Orfèvres to the station in one of the Police Judiciaire cars, so heavy was the traffic.

Eight extra trains had been laid on, and the crowd in the concourse, on the platforms, everywhere, laden with cases, trunks, various bundles, children, dogs and fishing rods, brought to mind an exodus.

They were all heading for the countryside or the seaside, where

they would occupy the smallest hotels, the most humble inns, not to mention those who would pitch a tent as soon as they found a suitable empty spot.

It was a hot summer. Maigret had come home feeling exhausted, as if he himself had been cooped up in a night train.

'What's the matter?' his wife had asked, ever on the alert since his spell of bronchitis.

'I'm beginning to wonder if it is a good idea to go away on holiday.'

'Have you forgotten what Pardon said?'

'I haven't forgotten.'

He was picturing with horror the packed hotels and boarding houses.

'Wouldn't we be better off spending our holiday in Paris?'

At first she had thought that he was joking.

'We almost never go for walks together in Paris. At best we might manage a weekly excursion to one of the cinemas on the Boulevards. In August everyone will be away, and we'll have the place to ourselves.'

'And before we know it you'll be dashing back to Quai des Orfèvres to deal with some work business or other.'

'I swear I won't.'

'So you say.'

'We can both go on an adventure, visit parts of Paris we've never set foot in, have lunch or dinner in quaint little restaurants ...'

'If they know you're here, the Police Judiciaire will telephone you the first chance they get.'

'They won't know I'm here. Nor will anyone else. I'll mark us down as "away" with the telephone message service.'

He found the idea irresistible, and soon he got his wife on board. So the telephone in the dining room remained silent, another detail it was hard to get used to. On two occasions he had reached out for it before he remembered he wasn't allowed to.

Officially he wasn't in Paris. He was in Les Sables-d'Olonne. That was the address he had provided to the Police Judiciaire, and if any urgent message came in for him it would be forwarded to him there.

He had left Quai des Orfèvres on Saturday evening, and everyone was under the impression that he had set off for the beach. On Sunday they hadn't emerged until the end of the afternoon, in order

to have dinner at a brasserie on Place des Ternes, some distance from their apartment, as if to explore pastures new.

On Monday morning, around 10.30, Maigret had gone as far as Place de la République, while his wife was doing the housework, and had read the papers on an almost deserted café terrace. They had had lunch at La Villette, dined at home and gone to the cinema.

Neither of them knew what they would do today, Tuesday, other than eat their fricandeau at home and then set off on another adventure.

It took a while to get used to this rhythm of life, as it felt strange not to be at the mercy of other commitments and watching the clock all the time. He wasn't bored. In truth, he was slightly ashamed of having nothing to do. Did his wife realize that?

'Are you going to get the papers?'

It had already become a habit. At 10.30 he would go to fetch the papers and probably read them on the same terrace on Place de la République. That amused him. Barely had he escaped his normal routine before he had created a new one.

He left the window, put on a tie and some shoes and looked for his hat.

'You don't need to be back before twelve thirty.'

Even for her he was no longer the real Maigret, now that he wasn't going into Quai des Orfèvres, and once again he recalled his mother saying to him:

'Go out and play for an hour, but make sure you're back for lunch.'

Even the concierge gave him a look of surprise tinged with a hint of reproach. Should a big, strong man like him be wandering around with nothing to do?

A municipal water-cart passed slowly, and he watched, as if he had never seen such a thing before, the water sprinkling out through a multitude of holes and washing over the roadway.

At headquarters the windows would all be wide open over the view of the Seine. Half the offices were empty. Lucas was in Pau, visiting family, and would not be back until the 15th. Torrence, who had just bought a second-hand car, was touring Normandy and Brittany.

There was hardly any traffic, and very few taxis. Place de la République seemed as static as on a picture postcard, with only a coachload of tourists providing a bit of life.

He stopped at a kiosk and bought all the morning papers he usually found on his desk and skimmed through before getting down to work.

Now he had time to read them properly; the day before he had even read some of the small ads.

He sat down on the same terrace, in the same place, ordered some beer, took off his hat and mopped his brow, as it was hot already, and unfolded the first of the papers.

The two largest headlines were about international events and a serious road accident that had claimed eight lives, when a coach had fallen into a ravine in the vicinity of Grenoble. Then his eye was caught by another headline in the right-hand corner of the page.

BODY FOUND IN A CUPBOARD

If his nostrils didn't exactly twitch, he nonetheless felt a certain quickening.

> The Police Judiciaire are keeping their cards close to their chest about a macabre discovery made yesterday morning, Monday, in the apartment of a well-known doctor on Boulevard Haussmann.
>
> The doctor in question is said to be currently on the Côte d'Azur with his wife and daughter.
>
> When she arrived for work yesterday morning after spending Sunday with her family, the maid is said to have been struck by a strange smell. When she opened the cupboard from which the smell seemed to be emanating she discovered the body of a young woman.
>
> Contrary to normal practice, the Police Judiciaire are being very sparing with information, which suggests that they attach a particular importance to this case.
>
> Doctor J—, the aforementioned, has been called back to Paris urgently, and another doctor, who has been acting as his locum while he has been on holiday, appears to be involved.
>
> We hope to be able to provide more details on this strange story tomorrow.

Maigret unfolded the two other morning papers he had bought.

One had not picked up on the story. The other, a little late off the mark, summarized it in a few lines, albeit under a headline in bold:

A DEAD BODY AT THE DOCTOR'S

> The Police Judiciaire have been investigating since yesterday a case that has the potential to be a new Petiot affair, with the difference that on this occasion there appear to be two doctors involved rather than just one. We understand that the body of a young woman has

been found in the surgery of a well-known medical practitioner in Boulevard Haussmann. To date we have been unable to acquire any further details.

Maigret caught himself muttering: 'Idiot!'

It wasn't the journalists he was complaining about, but Janvier, who was in charge of the force for the first time. He had been waiting for this opportunity for ages, since on all of Maigret's previous holidays there had been a more senior inspector available to replace him.

This year, for nearly three weeks, he was the chief, and Maigret was barely out of the door when a major case had come up, if the scraps of information in the papers were anything to go by.

But Janvier had already made his first mistake: he had got on the wrong side of the newspaper reporters. Maigret himself had on occasion hidden things from them, but he was usually subtle about it and gave the impression that he was taking them into his confidence while in fact telling them nothing.

His first instinct was to go to the telephone booth to ring Janvier. He remembered just in time that he was officially in Les Sables-d'Olonne.

According to the papers, the body had been discovered the previous morning. The police had been immediately informed, as had the prosecutor's office. Normally the afternoon papers on Monday would have published the information.

Had someone high up intervened? Or had Janvier taken it upon himself to impose an embargo?

'A well-known doctor on Boulevard Haussmann ...' Maigret knew the area, and when he had first arrived in Paris it was probably that neighbourhood that had most impressed him, with its carriage gateways offering glimpses of former stables at the back of large courtyards, the dappled shade of its chestnut trees and the smart cars parked along the pavement.

'Could you give me a token for the telephone?'

Not to ring police headquarters, because that wasn't allowed, but rather Pardon, who had been away at the seaside in July and who was the only other person in the know about Maigret's Parisian holiday.

Pardon was in his surgery.

'Tell me, do you know a Doctor J— who lives on Boulevard Haussmann?'

The doctor had also had time to read the morning paper.

'I was asking myself that same question at breakfast-time. I looked in the medical register. I was quite intrigued. It turns out that he is a highly respected physician, Doctor Jave, a former hospital trainee, who has a very large patient list.'

'Do you know him personally?'

'I've met him two or three times, but we lost touch several years ago.'

'What is he like?'

'Do you mean professionally?'

'To begin with, yes.'

'A sound practitioner, very skilled. He is around forty, forty-five maybe. A handsome man. The only thing that could be held against him, if you count it as a fault, is that he has specialized in private practice for the well-to-do. He didn't set himself up in Boulevard Haussmann for no good reason. I guess he makes quite a packet.'

'Married?'

'So the papers say. I didn't know. Look here, Maigret, I hope that you're not planning to rush back to work to take over this case.'

'No, I promise. What about the other doctor who was mentioned?'

'I'm not the only one who has been ringing around among my colleagues this morning. It's quite rare for something like this to happen in our profession, and we are as nosy as concierges. Like most doctors who take a holiday, Jave employed a young locum to cover his absence. I don't know him personally and don't think I've ever met him. His name is Négrel, Gilbert Négrel. He is around thirty and is one of Professor Lebier's assistants. Good credentials, as Lebier is said to be very fussy who he chooses for his team and difficult to get along with.'

'Are you very busy?'

'Right now?'

'In general.'

'It's quieter than usual, with most of my patients away on holiday. Why do you ask?'

'I'd like you to find out as much as you can about these two medics.'

'Are you forgetting that you're on leave, on doctor's orders?'

'I promise that I won't set foot in police headquarters.'

'Which doesn't prevent you meddling in this case as an amateur

sleuth, is that it?'

'Sort of.'

'OK. I'll make a few phone calls.'

'Maybe we could get together this evening?'

'Why don't you and your wife come and have dinner at the house?'

'No, dinner's on me. I'll take you and your wife out to a bistro somewhere. We'll pick you up around eight.'

All at once, Maigret was no longer the man he had been that morning. He had stopped daydreaming and feeling like a child having a day off school.

He returned to his seat on the terrace, ordered another beer and thought about Janvier, who must be terribly excited. Had Janvier attempted to ring him at Les Sables-d'Olonne to ask his advice? Almost certainly not. He would be dead set on solving the case all on his own.

Maigret was eager to know more, but given that he was no longer behind the scenes he would have to wait for the afternoon papers, just like the rest of the general public.

When he returned home for lunch his wife looked at him with a frown. She already suspected something was afoot.

'Did you bump into anyone?'

'No one. I just rang Pardon. We're taking them out to dinner tonight in a bistro. I'm not sure which one.'

'Are you feeling all right?'

'I'm on fine form.'

And so he was. The short piece in the newspaper had given his holiday a sense of purpose, and he wasn't at all tempted to go into his office and take the matter in hand. For once he was simply an onlooker, and he found the situation amusing.

'What shall we do this afternoon?'

'Let's go for a walk down Boulevard Haussmann and thereabouts.'

She didn't protest, didn't ask him why. They enjoyed a leisurely lunch without having to look at the clock, sat in front of the open window, and this was a rare treat. Even the noise of Paris was different from usual. Instead of the familiar cacophony they could make out distinct sounds, such as a taxi turning a street corner or a lorry pulling up outside a house.

'Are you taking a nap?'

'No.'

While she did the washing-up and got changed, he went out again to buy the evening papers. The case now merited banner headlines.

A NEW PETIOT AFFAIR
A WOMAN FOUND DEAD IN A CUPBOARD
TWO DOCTORS QUESTIONED

The best of the articles, written by young Lassagne, one of the sharpest reporters around, said:

A criminal affair that will resound far and wide and will no doubt have many more surprises in store has shattered the calm of one of Paris's most elegant streets, Boulevard Haussmann, between Rue de Miromesnil and Rue de Courcelles.

Despite the lamentable reluctance on the part of the police to pass on any information, we have been able, through our own investigations, to establish the following facts:

The third floor of 137A Boulevard Haussmann has been occupied for the last five years by Doctor Philippe Jave, 44, along with his wife and three-year-old daughter.

The Javes occupy both apartments on this floor, one of them serving as a waiting room and luxurious consultation rooms, for the doctor's patients are drawn from the most elegant strata of society, and many figure in *Who's Who*.

On 1 July the Jave family, accompanied by their child's nurse, left Paris for a six-week holiday in Cannes, where they had rented the Villa Marie-Thérèse.

On the same day, a young doctor, Doctor Négrel, took his colleague's place during consulting hours.

Normally, apart from the nurse, the Javes have two maids. One of them, who has family in Normandy, took her holiday at the same time as her employers, and only Josépha Chauvet, 51, stayed on in Paris.

As the residential apartment was empty, she only had to take care of the surgery.

Doctor Négrel, a bachelor living in furnished rooms in Rue des Saints-Pères, came every morning at nine o'clock, took note of any phone calls, went on his rounds, had his lunch in a restaurant and, at two o'clock, returned to Boulevard Haussmann for afternoon surgery.

Around six o'clock he was free from his duties, and Josépha Chauvet took the opportunity to go to her daughter's, where she usually spent the night. She lives in the neighbourhood, Rue Washington.

So what happened? Because the police are being so tight-lipped, it is difficult to reconstitute the chain of events, but a certain number of facts can be established.

Last Saturday Doctor Négrel left the surgery at Boulevard Haussmann at 5.30; Josépha was still there. During the course of that afternoon he had seen half a dozen patients, but no one in the

building had spotted any unusual comings or goings.

On Sunday Doctor Négrel visited friends in the country while Josépha spent the day with her daughter in Rue Washington, only returning on Monday morning at eight o'clock.

She began, as usual, by vacuuming the waiting room.

It was only when she reached the third room that she was struck by an unusual smell, which she described as 'sickly and disgusting', though she wasn't unduly concerned at first.

Finally, a few minutes before nine, intrigued, she opened the door to a fourth, much smaller room, which had been converted into a laboratory. That was where the smell was coming from – or, more precisely, it was coming from a cupboard.

The cupboard was locked. The key wasn't in the lock. As Josépha was examining the cupboard she heard some footsteps behind her. Turning round, she saw Doctor Négrel arriving.

Did she give a start? Did she turn pale? The indirect witness accounts that we have gathered are contradictory on this point. He allegedly said to her:

'What are you doing here?'

She reportedly replied:

'Can't you smell it?'

Apparently she thought it was a dead rat.

'Did Doctor Jave leave you any keys?'

Of course, we are simply piecing together the facts as best we can. A few minutes later Josépha left the building to go to fetch a locksmith on Rue de Miromesnil and she returned with him.

As he read this, Maigret wondered where Lassagne could have dug up all these details. It wouldn't have been Josépha who talked to him, he would swear to that. Still less Doctor Négrel. The concierge? It was possible. Maybe, later, the locksmith? He read on:

When they finally got the door to the cupboard open, the sight that met them was that of a completely naked woman, who had been bent double to squeeze her into the narrow space.

In the absence of Detective Chief Inspector Maigret it was Inspector Janvier who arrived on the scene, followed by the pathologist from the prosecutor's office, while the press, for reasons we have so far been unable to ascertain, were kept at a distance. There was no difficulty in identifying the body, as it was that of Madame Jave herself, whom everyone believed to be in Cannes.

Apart from a bruise on the right temple, which could have been caused by a fall, the body displayed no signs of violence.

Doctor Négrel claims not to have seen Madame Jave either on Saturday or on any other day since 1 July, when Doctor Jave and his wife set off for Cannes.

Josépha has apparently made the same statement.

So how was the young woman killed? And when? We believe that the pathologist places the time of death on Saturday.

At midday on Monday Doctor Jave was informed by telephone and caught a plane to Paris from Nice.

He spent the night, along with Doctor Négrel, at the Police Judiciaire. We have no details of their statements.

Even this morning the police refused to confirm whether either of the two men has been arrested.

Examining Magistrate Coméliau is in charge of the case, but he has been even less forthcoming than Inspector Janvier.

Our correspondent in Cannes has tried to make contact with the nurse, Mademoiselle Jusserand, who stayed down there with the child, but he was unable to gain access to the villa, which has already been visited twice by the Flying Squad.

Clearly, this is one of the most mysterious cases of recent years, and there will no doubt be further dramatic developments.

Who killed Madame Jave? And why? Why was her completely naked body stashed in a cupboard behind her husband's consultation room?

While we await the repercussions that will inevitably follow, we are able to provide some information about the characters involved in this drama.

Doctor Philippe Jave, 44, was born in Poitiers. After successful studies at the École de Médecine in Paris, he became a hospital trainee.

Prior to his marriage, he practised in Issy-les-Moulineaux. His surgery was a modest one, and his patients were mainly workers from the nearby factory.

Five years ago he married Éveline Le Guérec, sixteen years his junior, who was therefore twenty-eight at the time of her death.

The Le Guérec family own a canning plant in Concarneau: housewives will be very familiar with the 'Le Guérec et Laurent' brand of sardines.

Soon after the marriage the newlyweds moved to a luxury apartment on Boulevard Haussmann, and Doctor Jave quickly established himself as one of the most sought-after doctors in the capital.

Two years later, Monsieur Le Guérec Senior died, leaving the family business to his son Yves and his daughter.

The Javes have a three-year-old daughter, Michèle.

As for Doctor Négrel, he too is a talented doctor. Aged thirty, he is a bachelor and still occupies his student rooms on Rue des Saints-Pères, where he leads a modest life.

He has not set up in practice but works with Professor Lebier. This is the first time he has agreed to stand in as a locum for one of his colleagues.

We have tried to establish whether the Javes and Doctor Négrel

were on friendly terms prior to this arrangement, but we have received no reply to our inquiries.

At every turn – be it Quai des Orfèvres, Boulevard Haussmann or within the medical profession – we come up against a strange wall of silence.

Even the concierge has been unforthcoming and is merely willing to affirm that she was unaware that Madame Jave was in the building.

However, our correspondent on the Côte d'Azur has uncovered some information, albeit slim pickings. On Saturday morning at Nice airport a passenger corresponding to the description of Madame Jave was reportedly seen boarding the 9.15 plane, due to arrive at Paris Orly at 11.15. The airline refuses to confirm whether or not her name appears on the passenger list.

At the time of going to press, Doctor Paul is conducting a post-mortem.

When Maigret got back home he carefully cut out the article and slipped it inside a manilla folder, as he did when he was opening a file at Quai des Orfèvres. Except that, in the office, his files would contain original, authentic documents, whereas here he had to be content with more or less fictionalized cuttings from newspapers.

'Are you ready, Madame Maigret?'

She emerged from the bedroom dressed in a light cotton dress, a small white hat on her head and white gloves on her hands, and as they walked along the street arm in arm they looked every inch like a couple on their holidays.

'You seem to be starting to enjoy yourself,' she remarked with a sidelong glance in his direction.

He didn't reply but merely smiled, not thinking about poor Madame Jave but imagining Janvier at the sharp end of this case, which he must be dead set on solving all on his own.

2. Dinner at Père Jules

‘Calvados for everyone?’ he asked as he drew his pipe out of his pocket, just as the waitress in the white apron was bringing the coffee.

He understood the look his wife gave him, and the more furtive look she then gave Pardon. He wasn’t drunk, not even slightly the worse for wear. He couldn’t have drunk much more than the others, but he was nonetheless aware of a certain sparkle in his eyes, and a relaxed manner of talking that wasn’t usual to him.

Twice during dinner Madame Maigret had observed him tenderly, first when he had ordered fried whitebait, then when he had asked for grilled smoked sausage with pommes frites.

She had recognized the restaurant, in which they had not set foot for twenty years and which they had visited on only two previous occasions. The sign still read ‘Chez le Père Jules’. The wooden tables had been replaced with plastic versions in garish colours, and the bar inside had been modernized. The most extraordinary thing was that Père Jules himself was still there and didn’t seem to have aged at all, so much so that, with his mop of white hair, he looked like a film extra in a wig.

Although they had come to Joinville in Pardon’s car, it was Maigret who had chosen the restaurant, opposite the Ile d’Amour, around which boats and canoes glided.

There was a dance taking place nearby, and its jaunty tunes were mingling with music from the restaurant’s record player. There were not many customers, and most had slipped their jackets off;

quite a number were people from the neighbourhood who had dropped in.

Now, wasn't Maigret sticking to the programme he had mapped out for his holiday?

'There are things that everyone talks about, even writes songs about, but never gets round to doing,' he had declared at the start of the meal. 'One example is eating fried whitebait in a bistro on the banks of the Marne. Tell me, Pardon, how often have you eaten whitebait on the banks of the Marne?'

The doctor had searched in his memory. This had amused his wife, who had replied:

'Once, before my husband went into practice.'

'You see? We've done it twice. By the same token, we talk about wandering the streets of Paris, arm in arm ...'

'But we never have the time, alas!' Pardon had sighed.

'Well, this time, I'm taking the opportunity. What do you think we did this afternoon? We took the bus to Place Saint-Augustin, and, wonders never cease, the bus was almost empty. We didn't encounter a single traffic jam. Then we walked back via Boulevard Haussmann ...'

'Without stopping?'

'Without stopping.'

Maigret had looked at Doctor Jave's house, of course. A group of curious onlookers had gathered outside the varnished carriage gate, and a uniformed police officer was watching them in a bored fashion. It was the first time in a case such as this that Maigret had found himself on the side of the gawpers, and he found that amusing. The house stood between an oriental carpet shop and the shop front of a milliner's, which must have been very expensive, as there was only one hat on display.

It was just the sort of well-to-do, bourgeois, slightly old-fashioned building he had imagined.

After that they had continued on foot as far as Place des Ternes, where they had had a drink on a terrace before returning via Avenue de Wagram and the Champs-Élysées just like provincial tourists visiting Paris.

'Splendid!' Maigret had said as he had put together his strange meal.

His wife's first knowing look had been because this was exactly the same menu he had ordered the last time. Everything seemed to

delight him: the music, the couples going into the dance, the canoeists on the Marne, the slowly descending dusk. You could sense that he would have liked to take his jacket off like the others but didn't dare, perhaps because of Pardon.

And the look she had given Pardon said:

'You see how much better he is!'

It was true that he felt relaxed, as if rejuvenated. What the others were not aware of was that back in the spring he had got himself into a worse state than he would care to admit, even to himself. He would find himself worn out, exhausted by nothing at all, and was beginning to wonder whether he might end up like Bodard.

Bodard was a colleague of his from Special Branch, a decent man, conscientious to a fault, who had found himself the victim of undeserved attacks. Maigret had stood up for him the best he could, but there were grubby political interests behind this whole affair, and certain people high up needed Bodard as a scapegoat to exculpate themselves.

And they got away with it. Bodard had fought back for six months, attempting to save not so much his job as his very honour, but one morning, while mounting the staircase at Quai des Orfèvres, he had simply keeled over, dead.

It was perhaps because of Bodard that Maigret had decided to take this holiday and to allow himself the little pleasures he normally didn't get to indulge in.

Such as this dinner by the Marne. When he had gone to Rue Picpus to pick up Pardon, the doctor had simply said:

'Jave has returned home.'

'And Négrel?' Maigret had asked.

'I don't know.'

It was odd getting the information from a man like Pardon, who was not part of the force. They hadn't discussed it again during the meal. Now that the men had been served with calvados and the women with a liqueur, the latter did as they always did after dinner in Rue Picpus: they pulled their chairs together and started chatting in low voices.

The air was mild, humid, and there was a fine mist lifting off the river.

A couple in a canoe were drifting along on the current, playing tender love songs on a phonograph.

'I had Deberlin on the phone earlier,' Pardon was saying. 'It turns

out he knew Philippe Jave quite well. They did their training at the same time and socialized together until quite recently.'

'What did he have to say?'

'It seems that Jave comes from a fairly modest background in Poitiers. His father was a bank clerk and his mother a teacher. His father died when he was young, and it was his mother who brought him up. It was only because of scholarships that he was able to complete his studies, and student life can't have been that easy for him.

'According to Deberlin, Jave is a plodder – bright, reserved and strong-willed. Everyone expected him to specialize in cardiology, his passion, perhaps because he saw his father die of angina.

'Instead, he set himself up in a rather down-at-heel practice in Issy-les-Moulineaux and led the exhausting existence of most suburban doctors, working fourteen or fifteen hours a day.

'He was thirty-eight or thirty-nine when he went on holiday to Beuzec, near Concarneau, where he met Éveline.'

'The Le Guérec girl?'

'Yes. They seem to have fallen in love, and he married her. Deberlin often visited their home in Boulevard Haussmann, where they moved almost straight after the wedding. Deberlin had the impression they were a close couple.

'Éveline is pretty enough, but she doesn't exactly turn heads in the street. She had a rather joyless childhood growing up in the house of her father, who was a widower. She was shy and self-effacing, and had what Deberlin calls a feeble smile.

'Deberlin had the impression that she had health problems, but he didn't know the details, as Jave was a discreet sort of fellow.

'That's more or less all I found out, except that the Javes seemed besotted with their little girl.

'They didn't go out much, and received visitors about once a week. Deberlin is just about the only one of Philippe's old friends who kept in touch with them.'

'How did you find out that he had returned home?'

'Simple. It was on the radio.'

Maigret had a radio too but never thought of listening to it.

'On the seven o'clock bulletin they announced that the inquiry was taking its course and that Doctor Jave had returned to Boulevard Haussmann in a state of dejection.'

There they were, on the terrace of a suburban bistro, watching

the lights reflecting off the Marne, sipping a vintage calvados. What was Janvier doing at that precise moment? Was he in his office at Quai des Orfèvres, gathering witness statements and waiting for news from his colleagues out and about in Paris or elsewhere? Not having time to have dinner, had he had some sandwiches and beers sent up from the Brasserie Dauphine, as was their tradition?

Pardon must have seen the nostalgic expression pass over his face, because he asked:

'Tempted?'

Maigret looked him straight in the eye, thought for a moment, then said:

'No.'

It was true. The Boulevard Haussmann affair looked like it was turning into one of the trickiest and most demanding cases he had known. Firstly, because of the social milieu it had to be handled with kid gloves. It is always difficult to take on people of higher social status, because the slightest false move can lead to unfortunate consequences. Then this case was all about doctors. Certain professions tend to close ranks more than others, such as military officers, teachers, colonial officials or, however strange it may seem, post-office employees.

Janvier, who was pursuing an official inquiry, must be finding it harder to get information about Jave and Négrel than Maigret himself, who had his friend Pardon to turn to.

As well as that, poor Janvier had been landed with Coméliau, the most disagreeable examining magistrate to deal with. Coméliau was afraid of the press. Every article on a case he was involved in gave him the shakes or else put him in a foul mood.

'Above all, not a word to the reporters,' he would invariably insist.

Conversely, to avoid being criticized by the more impatient members of the press, he had a tendency to treat the first available suspect as the guilty party and not release him from custody.

As many as fifty or a hundred times in his career, Maigret had stood up to him, sometimes at the risk of his own job.

'What are you waiting for? Why don't you arrest him?' the little magistrate with the pointy moustache would bark.

'I'm waiting for him to put the rope round his own neck.'

'Or for him to escape over the border, maybe? Then the gutter press will have a field day ...'

Janvier didn't have Maigret's patience, his stubbornness or his ability to let Coméliau's rages wash over him. Maigret was convinced that it was because of Coméliau that Janvier had got on the wrong side of the papers from the start of the case, by refusing to give them even the most basic snippets of information.

'Anything on Gilbert Négrel?'

'Nothing more than I've already told you. He's a loner. Apart from his work for Professor Lebier I haven't heard much about him, and I know nothing whatsoever about his personal life. He can't have any private wealth, as he hasn't thought of setting up a practice. Unless he is working on his diploma and is aiming to go into teaching.'

It would have been easy to ring Doctor Paul, the pathologist, who was a friend, to find out the results of the post-mortem. What did Éveline Jave die of? There was no mention in the papers of a revolver, a knife or strangulation. If she had had a fatal accident, there would have been no reason to literally fold her in half and push her into a cupboard.

'Tell me, Pardon. How long after death is it possible to bend a body?'

'That depends on the state of rigor mortis. And that, in turn, depends on a number of elements, including the ambient temperature. One hour in some cases, several hours in others.'

That didn't move him any further forward. On the other hand, he didn't want to get immersed in the case. He had decided that he would follow it in the way newspaper readers throughout France were following it at that moment, and nothing more.

He was just a member of the public, not a policeman. The only thing that was bothering him was the responsibility that was weighing on Janvier, who, for the first time, was bearing the whole of the Police Judiciaire on his shoulders, at the height of the holidays, when at least half the force was not available.

'What we need to know above all is whether Jave was in Cannes at the time his wife died.'

It was easy to check, and Janvier must have thought about it. Only, Maigret himself did not know the results of the inquiry.

He didn't find out the answer until the next morning, at about eight o'clock, when he went out to buy the papers. The Pardons had dropped them outside their door around midnight. A little later, as she was undressing, Madame Maigret had murmured:

‘Will you promise me that you won’t go into the office?’

‘I promise.’

‘You see, you’re already doing much better! After three days of rest you’re a new man. But if you threw all that away because of some dead woman ...’

‘I won’t throw it away.’

She felt reassured when she saw him open the sideboard and take out the bottle of calvados.

‘A nightcap ...’ he murmured.

He wasn’t drinking because he was on edge, or feeling low, or to give himself a lift. On the contrary, this evening it was because he felt relaxed. It was the last little treat of the day.

Only, in the morning he didn’t stand by the window as his wife made the bed before going out to get the papers. He wasn’t breaking his word. He wasn’t involved in the case. He was following it, along with other readers, which is not the same thing at all.

The headlines were even bigger than the day before. The most striking one said:

THE DILEMMA OF THE TWO DOCTORS

A rival paper had the more cautious:

THE MYSTERY OF THE FOUR KEYS

Admittedly, both amounted to the same thing in the end. It seemed that the police had loosened up somewhat, since there were pieces of information that could only have emanated from Quai des Orfèvres or from the office of the examining magistrate.

Firstly, there was a very incomplete summary of the pathologist’s report.

> The post-mortem conducted by Doctor Paul has revealed that the bruise that we mentioned yesterday, on the victim’s right temple, is the result of a blow received a short time before the death, but that this blow was not sufficiently violent to have been the cause of death. It was not made by a blunt instrument. It may well have been the result of a fall on to the floor or a punch.
>
> Much more mysterious is the needle prick on Éveline Jave’s left thigh, as there is no doubt that it was caused by a hypodermic syringe.
>
> What substance was injected? We will know once the intestines and soft tissue have been examined by experts.
>
> The victim was not a drug addict and did not inject herself, otherwise older needle marks would have been evident on her body.

Besides, her husband is adamant this was not the case ...

Maigret was ensconced in the same spot as the day before, on Place de la République, and the sky was the same uniform blue, the air, soft and warm.

Because of all the wine and calvados of the night before, he had ordered a coffee, and he slowly smoked his pipe as he read through the three columns of more or less sensational information.

The most dramatic revelation was that Jave had left Cannes the previous Saturday and returned there on the Train Bleu on the Sunday morning.

They didn't give a full report of the doctor's questioning. To Maigret, who was au fait with such matters and who knew how newspapers operated, it was clear that there had been some confusion.

At first Jave seemed to be claiming he had driven to Monte Carlo on Saturday afternoon and spent the night at a casino in town.

Unfortunately for him, his car was spotted by staff at Nice airport, parked there between midday on Saturday and ten o'clock on Sunday morning.

So Janvier had done well. Maigret could imagine how many phone calls it had taken to reconstitute the chain of events.

At 9.15 on Saturday Éveline Jave had arrived at the airport in a taxi and caught a flight to Paris.

One hour later, her husband had arrived at the same airport in his car and inquired about flights. There were none available before midday.

As luck would have it, a British Airways Viscount had been held up by an engine fault and was just about to fly to London. He had got on this and, from London, found an immediate connection to Paris, where he had arrived at two in the afternoon.

The concierge at Boulevard Haussmann, however, was quite clear. She hadn't seen him, any more than she had seen his wife.

The concierge was a certain Madame Dubois, whom the reporter described as still young and good-looking, and who had a ten-year-old son. Her husband had walked out a few days after the child was born, and she had never heard from him again.

She had also, it was said, spent two hours at Quai des Orfèvres and on leaving had refused to make any comment.

The papers printed a photo of her, but it was impossible to make out her face, which she was covering with her right forearm.

Maigret knew the buildings on Boulevard Haussmann, which were all built around the same time and were pretty much of a standard type. The concierges' lodges are spacious, with a sort of reception room in front, and double glass doors allow a clear view of all the comings and goings.

Madame Dubois had seen Joséphа, the maid, arrive at eight o'clock in the morning. She had seen Doctor Négrel walk by at nine o'clock. She had then seen him come down again at 12.10, go back up at two o'clock and finally leave at 5.30.

Strangely, she hadn't seen either Doctor Jave or his wife.

But she at least must have entered the building as she was found there dead.

Still according to the newspaper, Jave, when put on the spot, had refused to account for his movements in Paris during Saturday afternoon and hidden behind professional confidentiality.

He had been released. Doctor Négrel was let go too, according to the latest report, which must have had Coméliau wrestling with his conscience.

On arrival at Orly airport at 11.15, Madame Jave had taken the Air France shuttle bus, which had dropped her at Boulevard des Capucines. The driver remembered her, because he had been struck by her very Côte d'Azur white tailored suit.

The white suit had disappeared, as well as the matching shoes and the underwear.

After Boulevard des Capucines, there was no further trace of the young woman's movements until the locksmith had opened the cupboard at nine o'clock on Monday morning in the presence of Joséphа and Négrel.

The question of the keys in fact complicated the issue. Still according to the papers, there were four keys in existence, which opened both the door to the residential apartment and that of the doctor's surgery. Joséphа had one of these keys; Doctor Négrel held another for the duration of his cover; Jave had the third; and the fourth was entrusted to the concierge.

Éveline Jave herself was not in possession of her key to Boulevard Haussmann.

That meant that someone must have opened the door to her. Unless, of course, the concierge had lied and had given her her own key.

If only Doctor Paul could have been more precise about the time

of death! His report said: ‘Saturday between four in the afternoon and six in the evening.’

At four o’clock Négrel was still at Boulevard Haussmann, as was Joséphа.

Négrel had left at 5.30, Joséphа around six, as she had nothing to do and was going to have dinner with her daughter.

As for Jave, he had been in Paris since two o’clock in the afternoon, but had taken the night train from Gare de Lyon at 7.55.

The paper published a photo of Joséphа caught off guard as she left her daughter’s apartment on Rue Washington. She was a tall, lean woman, with somewhat masculine features. The reporter hinted that the daughter, Antoinette, who was twenty-nine, had been involved in some rather dubious activities.

Mother and daughter, however, seemed to get on very well. Joséphа had her own room on the sixth floor of Boulevard Haussmann, along with the other servants in the block, but as often as she could she stayed overnight at her daughter’s, where she had a bed at her disposal. She did so on Saturday evening, and again on Sunday.

When the photographer had snapped her she hadn’t hidden her face, like the concierge, but had stared at the camera with a look of defiance.

The nurse remained shut away with the child in the Villa Marie-Thérèse in Cannes, and the reporters had had no joy ringing the doorbell.

One final piece of news at the foot of the third column: Yves Le Guérec, Éveline Jave’s brother, who ran the cannery in Concarneau, had arrived in Paris and was staying at the Hôtel Scribe.

Maigret finished his coffee, wondered whether he wanted anything else, folded up his papers and started walking around the square.

In general, a criminal case tends to have similarities with one or more previous cases, as the reasons for killing someone, along with the methods of committing murder, are limited.

But Maigret scoured his memory in vain for a case like this. He had come across four or five doctors who were criminals. One of them, a doctor in Toulouse, fifteen years previously, had killed one of his patients by administering a lethal dose of a toxic drug. It was only discovered by chance three years later that he owed this lady a great deal of money and this was the only way he could find to free

himself of his debt.

Another, around the same time in the Massif Central, had used a hypodermic syringe to inject a substance different from the one he had prescribed. He had claimed afterwards that it had been an unintentional mistake and was given the benefit of the doubt, since it is not implausible that, after a stressful day of doing rounds, he could have used the wrong phial, especially as it was fairly dark in the sick person's room.

As far as could be ascertained to date, Éveline Jave appeared to have been killed in the same way.

What was different from these earlier cases was that, in this instance, there was not just one doctor involved, but two.

Did her husband have a motive to do away with her? She was rich. It was thanks to his marriage that he was able to escape the suburb, where he had led a tough and joyless life, to become a society doctor in the capital.

Was he having an affair? Was he planning to set up with someone else? Or had his wife discovered some infidelity and threatened him with divorce?

Anything was possible.

Even a tale of jealousy. No one knew the circumstances that had led Éveline to leave Cannes on Saturday morning. What had she said to her husband? Were they in agreement about her trip? And, if yes, did Jave suspect that she had a reason different from the one she had given for her journey?

One thing was certain: he had followed her as quickly as he could and had got to Paris a short time after her.

Was Éveline Jave the mistress of young Négrel? Had she been for a while? Was it she who had suggested taking him on as a locum during their holiday?

Négrel might also have had a motive for getting rid of her. For example, if he had other marriage plans, and if she, for her part, was insisting on leaving her husband in order to marry him.

Or else ...

Maigret hadn't chosen the route back to Boulevard Richard-Lenoir but instead was following the Grands Boulevards, which he had rarely seen so deserted. Near Porte Saint-Denis, he went into a bar, sat down inside, ordered a beer and asked for a pen and paper.

As he was now just a member of the public he would play the role to the hilt and he had an ironic smile on his lips as he wrote in

block capitals:

BUT WHY ON EARTH WAS SHE NAKED?

On the envelope he put Janvier's name and the address of Quai des Orfèvres. He didn't sign it, of course. People who gave advice to the police very rarely signed their messages. He could picture Moers' face, in Forensics, if they asked him to analyse the block capitals, as he possessed samples of the inspector's handwriting.

But this letter would be too anodyne for Janvier to go to such trouble. More likely he would simply shrug it off.

It was, nevertheless, the key question. Either the young woman had got undressed herself or she had been undressed after her death.

As the body had no wounds, the clothes would not be stained with blood, and thus Maigret could see no valid reason to undress her.

On the other hand, what reason could she have had to strip entirely naked between four in the afternoon and six in the evening? To change her clothes? She would have done that in the apartment across the landing, where her bedroom and all her things were.

It wasn't to take a bath either. One of the papers had published a detailed plan of the premises.

The right-hand apartment comprised an entrance hall, a large drawing room, a smaller sitting room that they called the boudoir, three bedrooms, a dining room, a kitchen and a bathroom.

The one on the left, which was reserved for Jave's medical practice, was more or less conceived on the same plan, but the rooms were put to different uses.

This surely must be one of the most luxurious medical establishments in Paris. The drawing room served as the waiting room and was furnished, according to the paper, in pure Empire style. The boudoir, in Empire style too, was Jave's office, where he received his patients before going into another room to examine them.

Beyond the consulting room, and corresponding to one of the bedrooms opposite, there was a room dedicated to X-ray examinations and minor operations.

Then, finally, there was the laboratory, walled with cupboards from floor to ceiling. The decommissioned bathroom now served as

a store room for the household's trunks and suitcases, and the kitchen contained cleaning implements and other objects for which there was no other obvious place.

There remained one bedroom, with a bed and the other usual furnishings, which was used, it seems, when the Javes had a friend staying over or when the doctor had been working too hard and felt the need for a short nap.

It wasn't said whether the bed was unmade or not. Supposing Éveline had been murdered in the apartment opposite, why take the risk of carrying the body across the landing, since there were cupboards there in which the body could have been hidden?

Why take away her clothes?

Did the murderer intend, for example, to come back for the body in order to dispose of it in the Seine or in some wood outside Paris?

This begged another question. Jave had driven from Cannes in his car, which he had left at Nice airport. Did Négrel own a car?

The papers were silent on this point.

If the assassin intended to make the body disappear, it was likely he had access to a vehicle ...

Maigret set off walking again and stopped automatically in front of the familiar shop windows, as the cinema across the road was the one he visited the most frequently with his wife.

Outside a jeweller's, he caught sight of himself in a mirror, frowning, looking quite fierce with the effort of thinking so hard, and he laughed at himself.

This was, after all, just meaningless speculation. He had nothing to base it on. He suddenly got an insight into how it must feel to be a member of the public, knowing nothing about criminal matters other than what he reads in the papers.

The vehicle was a red herring. Had he not, three times at least in his career, seen murderers – one of them a woman – carry away their victims in a taxi to a railway station left-luggage office? All you needed was a sufficiently large trunk or a wicker basket such as those used by tradesmen.

In the present instance, did the murderer intend to disfigure the corpse before this last journey to make her unrecognizable and to prevent identification?

If it had been Négrel, why hadn't he returned on Sunday, when the coast was clear, while Josépha was at her daughter's?

There was an answer to that one too: he had no reason to be at

Boulevard Haussmann on a Sunday, and the concierge would not fail to notice him coming in and out, especially if he was carrying a large trunk when he left.

'You seem in a good mood,' his wife said as she opened the door to their apartment.

It was because he was having a laugh at himself. Here he was, playing the amateur detective when he had always made fun of them. At police headquarters they worked with known facts, and whenever a hypothesis presented itself, they had ways of testing it.

Madame Maigret was almost ready. She just needed her hat and gloves. He had decided to take her to lunch in an Italian restaurant on Boulevard de Clichy.

He wasn't just improvising here, strange though it may seem. If he didn't have a precise plan for how he would use his days, if he more or less followed his whims, it all rested nonetheless on a basic underlying idea.

As he had said to his friend Pardon the night before, he was indulging in the small pleasures his daily work never allowed him to experience.

That is why he had returned to Père Jules, where he had eaten fried whitebait and grilled sausage. Maybe it hadn't been as good as twenty years earlier, but he had enjoyed it all the same.

He was also content standing at his window in the mornings and watching the comings and goings on Boulevard Richard-Lenoir and the lorries driving in and out of Catoire et Potut.

He had never eaten at the Italian restaurant on Boulevard de Clichy where he was taking his wife. He had never set foot there, but had often walked past it and glanced into its dark interior, noting to himself that it would be a good place to eat some spaghetti.

There was something else that he wanted to do, but he wouldn't tell his wife about it, for fear that she would laugh at him. Perhaps he would be forced to find a quieter spot. Place des Vosges, for example, or the Parc Montsouris.

He wanted to sit on a bench and stay there for a long time, peaceful, not thinking of anything, smoking his pipe and watching the children play.

'Are you ready?' Madame Maigret asked as she pulled on a white glove.

She had put on some perfume, as on a Sunday or on trips to the

cinema, and she was wearing a floral dress.

'Just a moment.'

He just had to cut out that morning's articles and file them in his manilla folder.

After lunch they would slowly amble up to the Sacré-Cœur, like tourists, and on the way up Rue Lepic Madame Maigret would pause now and then to get her breath back.

3. The Lovers' Opinion

They had chosen a blue and white striped parasol. There were three cafés competing for territory on Place du Tertre, each one pushing out as far as they could, and their parasols were like flags: orange, dark blue, or blue and white stripes. The iron chairs were the same, as were the tables and no doubt the vin gris they served in jugs. It was like a never-ending festival, with coaches squeezing in through alleyways, almost forcing the walls apart, tourists armed with cameras, painters – mainly women – in front of their easels. There was even a fire-eater who also swallowed swords as a side-line.

Here too, Maigret and his wife exchanged the occasional look. They never spoke much when they were together. And in the looks they exchanged today, for example, there was nostalgia and recognition.

It was no longer the Place du Tertre that they had known when Maigret had first started out as a desk clerk at a police station, of course, but it was fun nonetheless. Now it was a multi-coloured fairground, noisy and more aggressively vulgar. But hadn't they changed too? Why demand that the rest of the world stays the same while we get older?

It was that, more or less, that they said to each other by batting their eyelids – that, and also 'thank you'.

The vin gris was young, and a bit acidic. The folding chair creaked under the bulk of Maigret, who had a tendency to tilt backwards. Sitting next to them, two lovers, whose joint age couldn't have been more than forty, held hands and watched the

comings and goings of the tourists. The boy's hair was too long; the girl's, too short. The houses were brightly painted like the set of a comic opera. One of the tour guides, with a megaphone to his mouth, was explaining something in English, then in German.

At that moment a newspaper seller appeared, but the only words audible in the confusion of noise were:

'... sensational revelations ...'

Maigret raised his arm and clicked his fingers, as if at school. He bought two rival afternoon newspapers, while the young lovers next to him settled for just one.

He kept the paper that Lassagne worked on for himself and passed the other to his wife. On the front page there was a large photograph of a girl in a bathing suit leaning on the side of a boat. The girl had very skinny legs and two small, pointed breasts, barely formed. She was smiling awkwardly and shyly at the camera.

What was it that gave her the look of a victim predestined by fate? The print was blurred – the newspaper had blown up a snapshot taken on a beach in bad light.

The caption read: 'Éveline Jave, photographed by her brother the year she met Doctor Jave'.

A young woman from the provinces, well-mannered but sad-looking, who must have lived in a strict household and longed for a different existence.

It was Yves Le Guérec himself, the paper went on to say, who had provided the picture to young Lassagne.

DOCTOR NéGREL SPEAKS EXCLUSIVELY

So one of the two men had agreed to meet, if not the whole of the press, at least one journalist. Lassagne, a lean redhead, sharp as a knife, must have passed a few nerve-racking hours, and Maigret could picture him dashing back to the newspaper office and rushing to his desk to file his report, which the office juniors would carry off section by section to be typeset.

If it wasn't quite as sensational as the newspaper seller was making out, and if there weren't any actual revelations in the proper sense of the word, the piece was nonetheless interesting. In his usual style, Lassagne first painted the scene:

> It was in his lodgings in Rue des Saints-Pères, in an old building a short walk from Saint-Germain-des-Prés, that Doctor Négrel granted us this exclusive interview.
>
> The house, a former private mansion, still bears on its façade the

arms of the distinguished French family who lived here, but this somewhat dilapidated building was long ago converted into apartments where several families live.

The courtyard is full of mopeds, bicycles and prams. A carpenter's workshop occupies the ground floor, and the steps of the staircase, with its magnificent wrought-iron banister, are worn smooth.

We climbed to the fourth floor, with its dormer windows, which once served as staff quarters, and, at the end of a dark corridor, we knocked at a door with a simple visiting card attached to it with a drawing pin.

We were expected. The door opened to reveal a young man with dark hair, a smooth complexion and matinée idol looks.

Doctor Négrel, as he would tell us later on, comes from the south of France, from Nîmes, where his family has lived for many generations. The family has had its ups and downs. One Négrel was a ship's doctor under Napoleon. Another was a public prosecutor under Louis-Philippe.

Doctor Négrel's father, who is still alive, is a photographer. The doctor studied at Montpellier University.

The doctor ...

Maigret stopped reading to crane an ear. The young lovers at the next table were reading the same paper more or less simultaneously with him, and the girl murmured:

'What did I tell you?'

'What?'

'It's a love affair.'

'Let me read the rest of it.'

Maigret smiled vaguely and read onwards too.

The doctor, despite his physical attributes, came across as a modest and serious man, and the events of the last few days appear to have hit him hard.

His lodgings looked more like those of a student than a doctor at the start of a brilliant career. He welcomed us in a room that serves as an office, a sitting room and a dining room. Through other doors we caught sight of a plain-looking bedroom and a tiny kitchen.

'I don't understand anything that has happened,' were his first words as he sat in the window recess, having shown us to an antique armchair in red plush. 'The police and then the examining magistrate questioned me for a long time and asked me questions I couldn't possibly answer. It seems they suspect me of killing Madame Jave. But why on earth would I do such a thing?'

He frowned with his thick eyebrows, which gave his face a deep look. On the table were the leftovers of a meal that the concierge must have bought for him locally. He was unshaven and wasn't wearing a tie or a jacket.

I asked him:

'Will you permit me to ask you a number of questions, for the benefit of our readers?'

'I'll reply to the best of my ability.'

'Even if the questions are indiscreet?'

He shrugged, like a man who had already been asked the most indiscreet questions.

'To begin with, how long have you known the Javes?'

'I've known Doctor Jave for three years. "They" asked me that too.'

'Where did you meet him?'

'While working for my employer, Professor Lebier. I'm his assistant. Jave sometimes brought us patients for consultation, and once, when I was in a hurry to get into town, he gave me a lift in his car.'

'Did you become friends?'

'He said that one day he'd like to invite me for dinner.'

'Did you go?'

'Six months later, by chance. At the end of a consultation with Professor Lebier he asked me if I was free that evening, as he had invited a few interesting people, so I went round to Boulevard Haussmann.'

'Is that when you met Madame Jave?'

'Yes.'

'What was your first impression of her?'

'I was the least important among the guests so I ended up at the foot of the table. I didn't have much chance to talk to her.'

'Did she seem like she was happy?'

'Neither happy nor unhappy. She behaved like any hostess.'

'Did you often go back to Boulevard Haussmann as a guest?'

'Fairly often.'

'According to your colleagues, you don't go out much and rarely dine in town.'

At this point in the conversation, Négrel appeared a little embarrassed, but finally he gave a smile.

'The Javes,' he explained, 'entertained a lot, at least once a week, and there were always fifteen or so people there. Sometimes there was a woman or girl too many, and they telephoned me at the last minute to come and even up the numbers.'

'Why did you go along with this?'

'Because they were nice people.'

'Both of them?'

'Both of them, yes.'

'What did you think about Jave?'

'That he was an excellent practitioner.'

'As a man, I mean.'

'I've always considered him a decent man, and indeed a man of great integrity.'

'Yet you surely don't hold society doctors in high regard.'

‘He was more than just a society doctor.’

‘Did you eventually become a family friend?’

‘ “Friend” is perhaps overstating it. Despite the difference in our ages, Philippe and I got on very well.’

‘Did you address him in the familiar form?’

‘I do that with very few people. That’s not how we do things in Protestant Nîmes, where I was born and grew up.’

‘And did you address Éveline Jave in the familiar form?’

‘No.’

And that ‘No’ was rather curt.

‘How would you describe your relationship with her?’

‘Cordial. I’d go as far as to say friendly.’

‘Did she ever confide in you?’

‘She merely said to me, and I’d heard this from her husband too, that she hadn’t had a life like other women.’

‘Why was that?’

‘Because of her health.’

‘Was she in poor health?’

‘I don’t think I am betraying any confidences, as I am not her doctor, if I say that she suffered from Stokes-Adams disease, more commonly known as a chronic slow pulse. Her heart has been beating at a rate of forty or forty-five beats a minute, as opposed to the more normal seventy, since she was a child.’

‘What are the effects of this condition?’

‘The patient can lead an apparently normal life. But at any moment there is a risk of fainting, convulsions or even sudden death.’

‘Did she know that?’

‘Since the age of twelve. She had a consultation with a top specialist. She overheard him talking at the door and understood everything.’

‘Was she afraid?’

‘No. Rather, resigned.’

‘Was she happy in spite of this?’

‘In a suppressed sort of way, if I can put it like that. It was as if she always feared that too much exuberance would bring about an attack.’

‘Was she afraid to have a baby?’

‘No. On the contrary, she was happy to leave something behind her, even if it ended up costing her her life.’

‘Did she love her husband?’

‘I guess so, since she married him.’

‘Did he love her?’

‘He always seemed very attentive.’

‘Did you ever meet her in private, I mean without her husband around?’

The young doctor was silent, his brow creased in a frown.

‘Yes and no. I never went to see her personally. But sometimes, when I was around at Boulevard Haussmann, Jave was called away to

see a patient urgently.'

'And on those occasions, she never tried to confide in you?'

'No, not what you would call "confide".'

'To speak about her life?'

'In the way everyone talks about their past, their childhood.'

'So you became good friends?'

'If that's how you want to put it.'

'She never visited you here, in your lodgings?'

Another silence.

'Why are you asking me this?'

'I'll be straight with you. I showed Éveline Jave's photo to your concierge, and she claimed that she had seen her go up to visit you twice, the last time six weeks ago.'

'The concierge is lying, or has mistaken her for someone else.'

At the adjoining table the girl was saying:

'Who do you believe? The concierge or the doctor?'

They were reading at the same speed. Her boyfriend replied:

'Concierges are all cows. But the doctor seems a bit thrown.'

'I told you it was a love affair ...'

Madame Maigret, who had finished the no doubt shorter article in the other paper, had laid it on her lap and was dreamily watching the tourists come and go.

Maigret was forgetting his role at the Police Judiciaire, the profession he had exercised his entire life, and was surprised to find himself reading the paper like a normal man in the street. Suddenly he made a little discovery, which delighted him.

As a rule, those moralistic types who take it upon themselves to lecture other people claim that there is something unhealthy, perverse even, in the desire of certain readers to lap up tales of crimes and disasters.

Without having thought that much about it, Maigret, even up to the previous day, would have tended to be of the same opinion.

He now suddenly realized that it wasn't so clear-cut, and the remarks of the girl at the adjoining table had gone some way towards changing his mind.

Didn't readers devour just as avidly tales of heroic or exceptional acts? Has there ever been such a large or excited turnout as the one on the Grands Boulevards, in the middle of the night to boot, to greet Charles Lindbergh?

Weren't people just fascinated to learn what human beings were capable of, whether for good or bad?

Didn't the curiosity of the girl sitting next to him stem from a

desire to know, as a novice in love, what the limits of love are?

She was hoping that the newspaper, and the course of the inquiry into the death of the woman on Boulevard Haussmann, would show her this.

Lassagne, extracting maximum mileage from his exclusive interview, continued:

> We then asked him:
> 'Do you have many female visitors, Monsieur Négrel?'
> 'Previously, I received one or two, yes.'
> 'What do you mean by "previously"?'
> Throughout our whole conversation he smoked one cigarette after another, stubbing them out on the sill of the open window.
> 'A year ago I got engaged. The police know this. They have no doubt already questioned the girl, so there is no point in being secretive about it.'
> 'May we know her name?'
> 'They will no doubt tell you at Quai des Orfèvres. I don't see it as my role.'
> 'Does the girl live with her parents?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'Does she work?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'Is she from a respectable family?'
> 'Her father is a well-known lawyer.'
> 'And she came to see you here?'
> Silence.
> 'I'm now going to be even more indiscreet, doctor, and I ask you to forgive me. Have you at any point been Madame Jave's lover?'
> 'I've already been asked that question.'
> 'And what did you reply?'
> 'No.'
> 'Have you ever been in love with her?'
> 'Never.'
> 'Or she with you?'
> 'She has never done or said anything that would give me that impression.'
> 'Did you see her last Saturday?'
> 'No.'
> 'Did you see Jave?'
> 'Neither him nor her. I saw five patients that afternoon, and their records were all found in the office. I left at five thirty, having said goodbye to Josépha and asked her to close all the windows.'
> 'Who had the idea of you acting as locum this summer?'
> 'Doctor Jave.'
> 'How did he manage in previous years?'
> 'He employed one of my colleagues, Doctor Brisson, who started a

practice in Amiens last winter and so is no longer available.'

'One last question. Do you think Joséphа is especially devoted to her employers?'

'I haven't really thought about it all that much.'

'You've recently been living alongside her for several weeks. You have had frequent contacts with her. Is she the sort of woman who would bear false witness to protect one or other of her employers?'

'I can only repeat: I have no idea.'

Lassagne concluded:

> And so we took our leave of this man whose honour, future and even life are now at stake. Guilty or innocent, he knows the weight of words and the threats which weigh down on him. He seemed to us determined to defend himself, calmly, without becoming impassioned or angry, and the final look he gave us from the top of the staircase was full of bitterness.

'This is what I think happened,' said the girl on the adjoining table. 'They were lovers, her and the young doctor. The concierge has no reason to lie, and I'm sure that she really did recognize her. Her husband is older than her. He treated her like a little girl, and women don't like that. Négrel, on the other hand, is a good-looking boy, with those gentle eyes ...'

Maigret smiled through his pipe. Where did the 'gentle eyes' come from? Was it because the article mentioned thick eyebrows?

'I'm quite sure he is in love. Reading his replies, you get the feeling he's holding something back. And look at how he keeps stubbing out his cigarettes on the window-sill.'

'That's irrelevant.'

'It shows that he is churning inside but is forcing himself to appear calm. She was obliged to go to Cannes with her husband and daughter. I bet she was the one who suggested him as a locum. That way, with Négrel in Boulevard Haussmann part of the time, there was still a connection between them.'

'You have a vivid imagination.'

Maigret was starting to think that this couple weren't made for each other. The boy was blond and came across as quite serious. The girl seemed to wrap him up with her supple body as she clung to him, and this was causing him embarrassment, from the apologetic look he addressed to the people around them.

'Don't talk so loud.'

'I'm not saying anything bad. After a month apart she couldn't stand it any more, so she took the plane with the intention of

catching an evening flight back to Cannes. She probably told her husband she was off to visit a friend on the Côte. He was suspicious, so he followed her.

'That afternoon he caught them together in the bedroom behind the consulting room. He let Négrel go. It was his wife that he blamed. He hit her. She passed out. Then he decided to do away with her, so he gave her an injection.'

'Why did he put her in the cupboard if it was a crime of passion?'

Madame Maigret, who was listening too, exchanged a glance with her husband. It was curious, in this fairground atmosphere, to listen to such light-hearted, even playful chat about a tragedy. The people involved, in the girl's version, lost their humanity, their tragic reality, and became trite characters in a trashy novel.

And yet, what she was saying might well be the truth. Her hypothesis, from what Maigret knew of the case, was just as plausible as any other.

'Don't you see? By putting her in the cupboard and returning to Cannes, then making out he had never gone to Paris, he was putting Négrel in the frame as the murderer. The proof of that is that he is still the main suspect.'

'They're both suspects.'

'Who told you that?'

'I bet the police let them go to watch them and wait until one of them made a false move.'

That wasn't so stupid either. Basically, the general public is much less stupid than is often thought.

Poor Janvier was faced with a dilemma which policemen don't encounter very often. Normally you assume that a suspect is guilty, and the question is whether it is better to charge him or let him go while waiting to find more conclusive evidence.

In the case of just a single possible guilty party Coméliau wouldn't have hesitated: he would have charged him.

But with two? They couldn't both have killed Éveline Jave. So one of the doctors must be innocent. To keep them both in custody would implicitly mean depriving an innocent man of his liberty.

Even Coméliau could grasp that and so he had resigned himself to letting them both go free.

Who would be on surveillance duty in the street next to the building where Négrel lived while Lassagne was conducting his interview? Lapointe? Gianni?

There would be someone there, just as there would be a police officer on duty in Boulevard Haussmann.

One of the two doctors had agreed to meet the press, choosing the newspaper with the highest circulation.

The other was keeping his counsel and was locked away in his apartment. Lassagne went on to say:

> We had no luck in arranging an interview with Doctor Jave. Since leaving the Préfecture de Police and returning to Boulevard Haussmann he has seen no one, apart from Josépha. He must have taken his telephone off the hook, because every time we rang we got an engaged tone.

'Having another?' Madame Maigret asked when she saw her husband summoning a waiter.

Yes, he was having another glass of vin gris. He was thirsty. But more than that, he didn't want to leave.

'So what do you think about it?' she asked in a soft voice.

He simply shrugged his shoulders. His usual reply to that question was to say that he never thought, which was more or less the truth. He was starting now to get a clearer picture of two of the protagonists: Éveline Jave and Doctor Négrel. They were no longer merely names, Éveline in particular had come more to life since he had seen her photo, and in Janvier's shoes he would have made a beeline for Concarneau.

It didn't hold the key to the drama. Nevertheless, it was the place where the young woman had spent most of her life, and he would have liked to know more about her.

Had she had a convent education? He would have sworn to it, from the way she held herself and gazed at the camera. He imagined a house devoid of women, a grey house no doubt, probably smelling of fish, with a father and brother with no interest in anything but business.

How did she adapt to life in Paris? And whenever she hosted a dinner or a party, did she continue to feel awkward and out of place?

Négrel was from the provinces too, despite his matinée idol looks. He was a Protestant from Nîmes. When he had qualified he hadn't set up a practice but become his professor's assistant.

Lassagne had managed to get him to admit that he had formerly entertained a number of women in his lodgings in Rue des Saints-Pères, and Maigret would have bet that they were easy women from

Saint-Germain-des-Prés. He would even have bet that these were short visits, and that none of them spent the night in the young doctor's bed.

Now he had been engaged for a year. Maigret was dying to ring Janvier to find out the young lady's name. The daughter of a well-known lawyer. And she came to his place. That had the makings of a scandal.

The young lovers went off arm in arm, leaving their newspaper behind on the café table, and headed off towards the Sacré-Cœur. As they passed, the girl gave Maigret's hat an amused look, even though there was nothing the slightest bit ridiculous about it. It was true that she wasn't wearing a hat herself, and her hair was cut short like that of a Roman emperor.

'What do they say in your paper?'

'Probably the same as in yours.'

He opened it mechanically. It too had a photograph on the front page – not Éveline Jave, this time, but her brother, Yves Le Guérec, leaning on the bar of the Hôtel Scribe.

He didn't much resemble his sister. He was a broad, thick-set young man with a bony face and crew-cut hair which was probably red.

Unable to reach Négrel or Jave, it was he whom little Lassagne's rival had gone to interview.

Yves Le Guérec, they learned, was married with two children and had built himself a villa three kilometres from Concarneau. He had taken over the management of the canning plant after his father had died.

'My sister has never come back since she got married. I don't know why. Probably because her husband wanted to take her away from her family.'

'You haven't seen her since?'

'Occasionally, when I was up in Paris, I'd drop in to visit her. Once I took my wife and children to Boulevard Haussmann, but I got the impression we weren't exactly welcome.'

'Why was that?'

'We're simple folk. We don't frequent the same circles as Doctor Jave ...'

'Didn't he set himself up with your sister's dowry?'

'When he got married he was penniless. In fact, he had debts. My father paid them off, and he paid for everything at Boulevard Haussmann too.'

'You don't like your brother-in-law?'

‘I didn’t say that. Let’s just say we’re not cut of the same cloth. Or rather, that’s what he’d like you to believe, since his mother was nothing more than a schoolteacher ...’

You could sense old grudges rising to the surface here. They lived in two separate worlds. The Le Guérecs, in spite of their wealth, continued to lead a plain, simple existence, while Jave, who had come into contact with metropolitan life, had changed.

But it was the sardine canners who footed the bills.

‘My sister inherited half of the shares in the factory, and she receives a tidy sum each year, believe me.’

‘Was she married under the convention of common assets?’

‘Unfortunately, yes.’

‘And you?’

‘Me too. But it’s not the same. My wife is the daughter of a ship-owner, and ship-owners are of the same sort as us.’

‘Do you think she was murdered?’

‘Do you think Éveline could have injected herself then stuffed herself, folded in two, into a cupboard to die, having locked the door? Where is the key? Where are her clothes?’

‘Who do you think killed her?’

Le Guérec made as if to speak but changed his mind.

‘I don’t want to be sued for slander. The facts speak for themselves, don’t they? And those who make out that my sister had a lover are lying. She wasn’t capable of that. She wasn’t the type. She was afraid of men. When she was a girl and we went to a dance, she sat in the corner and would only agree to dance with me. Look at this photo. I can remember her searching everywhere for a swimming-costume that revealed next to nothing. She took it to an extreme.’

‘Did she write to you often?’

‘On my birthday, and those of my wife and children, as well as the New Year.’

‘Did she know she was ill?’

‘She always knew she wouldn’t make old bones, but she was resigned to it.’

‘Was she religious?’

‘At home she was very religious and went to mass every morning. Later I discovered that her husband had rubbed off on her, and she was no longer practising.’

‘Do you think she was unhappy?’

‘I’m sure she was.’

‘What do you base that on?’

‘You just get a feeling. The way she always said with a vague smile: “Don’t forget to come and see me whenever you’re in Paris. And tell the children their aunt is thinking of them ...” ’

And yet, she was naked when they found her body in the cupboard.

Had her murderer undressed her after the event?

Again, it was an unlikely theory, especially as it is really quite difficult to undress a dead body.

Why undress her anyway?

What was Jave doing, alone with Joséphа in the apartment in Boulevard Haussmann?

What answers had he given to Janvier and the examining magistrate concerning his dash back to Paris?

The fact that Coméliau hadn't put him under arrest meant there must be some serious doubts, and it was almost certain that the two suspects were more or less equally under suspicion.

Now Maigret wanted to find out more about Philippe Jave and his personal life. Did he have a mistress, a second household? Or was he indeed the worldly but austere doctor that most people saw him as?

'What shall we do?' asked Madame Maigret, as her husband was summoning the waiter to pay for their drinks.

He didn't know. It didn't really matter, and that was the most wonderful thing about it.

'Let's start by going down the Saint-Pierre stairs ...'

They would then saunter along Boulevard Rochechouart. After that they could go down into Rue des Martyrs, for example, where he liked the teeming crowds. He also liked the Faubourg Montmartre.

Having nothing to do meant he could see Paris in a new light, and he wasn't going to waste a moment of it.

'I must phone Pardon this evening.'

'You're not sick, are you?'

'No. He might have some new information about Doctor Jave.'

'Are you worried about that?'

He wasn't bothered at all. He thought about it a lot, of course, but it was just an ornamentation, decorating his walks around Paris.

'Tomorrow morning I might have a wander round Rue des Saints-Pères.'

That was risky, as there weren't many passers-by there, and he might bump into one of his inspectors.

'I'm thinking about going to see the sea at Concarneau.'

He was coming up with these plans without really believing in them, just for the fun of it. This was all for Janvier to sort out, and Maigret was enjoying a foretaste of what retirement would be like.

The thought cast a shadow. He could accept being at a loose end, being a member of the general public for a few days at a time, three weeks at most.

But how would it be to play this role for the rest of his days?

As they were walking towards the square in front of the Sacré-Cœur he suddenly gripped his wife's arm, and she realized that he was moved, and he even thought she understood why, but she didn't say anything.

4. Where Was Josépha?

He hadn't phoned Pardon that evening as he said he would when they were in Place du Tertre. In truth, he hadn't even thought about it.

It must have been around five o'clock when he and his wife turned the corner of Faubourg-Montmartre and the Grands Boulevards. The sun was beating down on the pavement, which, due to the lack of pedestrians, seemed much wider than usual. Between a dressmaker's display window and a cutler's shop he had spotted the gloomy entrance to a sort of tunnel and heard the tinny sound of a bell like the ones they used to use in cinemas.

In fact, it was the entrance to a small cinema, one he didn't recall ever seeing before. They were showing early Charlie Chaplin films, and Maigret stopped and hesitated for a moment.

'Do you want to?' he suggested to his wife.

She looked a bit suspiciously at the dark plush curtain behind the ticket kiosk and at the greyish walls of the corridor.

'Do you think it's clean?'

In the end they decided to go in. When they came out later the glorious August sun had disappeared, replaced all along the Boulevards by a double garland of lights and neon signs. They hadn't realized that it was the day they changed the programme and they had, in fact, sat through two separate screenings.

It was too late to go home for dinner.

'We'll grab a bite round here somewhere.'

Madame Maigret had remarked:

‘If we go on like this I will forget how to cook.’

They went to Place des Victoires, to a restaurant whose quiet terrace appealed to them. Then they returned home on foot, and by the end Madame Maigret was tottering on her heels. They hadn’t walked so much together in years.

They went to sleep with the window open, and almost immediately it was a new day, and a sun brighter than the one they had left behind in Boulevard Montmartre, a cool feel to the air and the familiar sounds of the morning.

They had no particular plan for the day, and over breakfast Madame Maigret asked:

‘Should I do some shopping?’

What was the point? Shopping meant having to prepare a meal, which meant they would have to be home at a predetermined hour.

‘We can eat here all year round.’

‘Except when you don’t come back.’

It was true that, if you added up the days when a case obliged him to take his meals in town, there weren’t so many left when they could eat together in the apartment.

All the more reason why it would be fun to have lunch or dinner out with her.

No shopping! No ties! A first pipe at the window, watching the puppet movements of the little man from Catoire et Potut. In the bistro opposite, the landlord in shirt-sleeves, reading the newspaper he had spread out on his zinc bar.

Maigret could have had his papers brought up each morning by the concierge, but that would have taken away the pleasure of going to fetch them himself.

Eventually he got dressed, while his wife was taking care of the housework.

‘I’ll come and fetch you a bit later. I’m not sure yet where we’ll be going.’

‘Today, in any case, I’ll be wearing flat-soled shoes.’

New habits were being formed. He bought his papers at the same kiosk, waited until he had sat down on his terrace in Place de la République before opening them, and the waiter already knew what to serve him.

CRIME OR ACCIDENT?

The professor of toxicology who had conducted the examination of

the intestines had submitted his report. For one reason or another, Quai des Orfèvres was being less parsimonious with information than it had been at the beginning, and the papers offered a summary of the report.

A significant quantity of digitalin had been discovered in Éveline Jave's body.

> We questioned Professor Loireau about this, and he provided us with some interesting information.
>
> Digitalin is a drug frequently employed to slow down the heart. The dose administered to Madame Jave was not large and would normally have had no fatal consequences.
>
> What is disturbing here is that this drug should be administered at all, since it is firmly contraindicated for someone with her medical condition.
>
> Ever since her childhood Éveline Jave has had a slow heartbeat. If she had an attack, Professor Loireau informed us, she would need a stimulant for the cardiac muscle such as camphor, the one most commonly used, or Pressyl, which is currently fashionable.
>
> Digitalin, on the other hand, would almost certainly be fatal for her, because instead of alleviating the effects of a slow pulse it would enhance them.
>
> Did Madame Jave have an attack on her return to Boulevard Haussmann? Did she acquire the bruise on her temple through falling while in the grip of this attack?
>
> Did the doctor who was on the scene – and we don't know yet which one it was – in his panic get confused over which phial to use and inject her with digitalin instead of camphor or Pressyl?
>
> Or alternatively, fully intending to kill her, did he deliberately use a substance that he knew would have deleterious effects on the sick woman?

Maigret sat for a few minutes watching people pass by in front of the terrace, then asked for a token and ensconced himself in a telephone booth.

'Hello! Pardon?'

The doctor had already recognized his voice.

'Am I disturbing you?'

'I was just about to set off on my rounds, but I can spare you a couple of minutes.'

'Have you read it?'

'I'm sure hundreds of doctors all over Paris have been avidly reading the news.'

'What are your thoughts?'

'The article is not scientifically rigorous, but it is broadly

accurate.'

'Could it have been an accident?'

'At a push, yes. I've just been looking into it. Certain injectable substances are contained in characteristic phials, which make it virtually impossible to make a mistake.'

'Characteristic in what way?'

'There are phials that have just one end tapering, others with both. And some have the name of the contents on them. Some are even coloured.'

'And in the present case?'

'Camphor, which is sold by several laboratories, comes in differently shaped phials, some with one point, some with two. Pressyl is more easily recognizable. I've just dug out an phial of digitalin from my cabinet and compared it with an phial of camphor.'

'Do they look similar?'

'Enough that a man in a hurry and in an anxious state could mix them up.'

'And what is your opinion?'

'I don't have one. I have simply found out that Jave called Doctor Mérou yesterday evening. He's a cardiologist. I don't know whether Jave suffers from heart problems himself, or whether he wanted to consult Mérou about what had happened to his wife.'

'Do you know Mérou?'

'We're friends, but he won't say anything on the subject, and it would be indelicate on my part to ask him about it.'

'Have you discovered anything else about Doctor Jave?'

There was a silence at the other end of the line. Doctors stick together, in spite of everything.

'You've kept away from Quai des Orfèvres?'

'Thank God, yes.'

'It's just a rumour doing the rounds in the medical world. I'm sure I don't need to tell you we're all in a bit of a turmoil, trying to make sense of this. Someone told me yesterday that, for all his glitzy façade, Jave is in debt and has had his back to the wall for several months now.'

'What about his wife's money?'

'That's all I know. Don't tell this to the police – they'll find out themselves soon enough. I don't want this to come from me.'

'One last question on the phials. You've held both phials in your

hand and you have a doctor's instincts. Could you have mixed them up?'

He could sense his unseen interlocutor hesitating for a moment. Pardon finally replied, weighing his words carefully:

'If it was my wife, maybe. It's easy to get into a state when it concerns you or your loved ones.'

'Or your mistress?'

Pardon gave a little laugh.

'I haven't had a mistress since I was training.'

Maigret returned to the terrace and sucked dreamily on his pipe. It was almost time for his first beer of the day, and he followed the hands of the electric clock with his eyes.

'Another token,' he finally asked the waiter.

In the booth, he rang the newspaper that Lassagne worked for. There was a good chance that the redheaded reporter would be writing up his article around now.

'Monsieur Lassagne, please, mademoiselle.'

'Who shall I say is calling?'

'Tell him I have some information on the Jave affair.'

The newspaper must receive dozens of calls of that nature, most of them from madmen and cranks, but at the Police Judiciaire they listened to them patiently, because every now and then they gave an interesting lead.

'Hello ... Who am I speaking to?'

Lassagne spluttered as he talked.

'That's not important, Monsieur Lassagne. I don't have any information as such, I just wanted to point out something you have missed in your articles.'

He was disguising his voice, more or less successfully.

'I don't have a lot of time. Quickly, tell me what I've missed.'

'Where was Josépha on Saturday afternoon?'

The reporter replied curtly:

'In the apartment.'

He was about to hang up, but the inspector was quick off the mark.

'Which apartment? That's what I'm trying to say. Listen for a moment. Apart from the nurse the Javes had just two servants. That's not many for an apartment the size of theirs, by which I mean their living quarters. On the other hand, in the apartment opposite, once the cleaning was done, there was nobody, except

maybe someone to open the door to patients.'

Lassagne didn't hang up; Maigret could hear him breathing.

'I think I understand.'

'Where would Joséphа have been during surgery hours? In the doctor's apartment? In the waiting room? In the bedroom? In the bathroom? Would she have stayed there doing nothing while there was work to be done in the apartment opposite? I'm sure that the bell on the doctor's door must be wired up to the other apartment.'

'Won't you tell me who you are?'

'My name is of no importance.'

'Thank you. I will look into it.'

Maigret felt slightly ridiculous playing the role of a crank ringing up the newspapers, but it was the only means he had of getting hold of some information of interest to him.

It was likely Janvier knew the answer already. But he couldn't ring Janvier. For a moment he thought of contacting Lapointe and swearing him to secrecy about his still being in Paris. Did he decide not to simply because it would have been too easy?

It was an important question. It was obviously possible that Joséphа had been lying all along and that she had seen Madame Jave or her husband come in or go out. But it was also possible that she was in the other apartment and knew nothing of what was going on on the other side of the landing.

Éveline Jave had no key, of course. But was Négrel expecting her? Hadn't she been able to ring him from Orly, or even before taking off in Nice?

That left the concierge. Had the concierge lied? The living room of her lodge was separated from the kitchen and the bedroom by a thick curtain, as is the case in many apartment blocks. Had she perhaps been busy behind the curtain when Éveline Jave had arrived?

He ordered his beer and drank it slowly. He continued to mull over the case, but dispassionately, with a sort of detachment. He could imagine the frenzy going on at Quai des Orfèvres, the impatient phone calls from Coméliau, who always thought that the police weren't working quickly enough.

Janvier would know, from the inspector on guard at Boulevard Haussmann, that Jave had had recourse to Doctor Mérou. He would also know, from the officers of the Flying Squad who had questioned the nurse in Cannes, under what circumstances Éveline

Jave, and then her husband, had left the Villa Marie-Thérèse.

There had been no mention of the nurse coming to Paris, or the child, and it was understandable that they would want to keep both of them well out of it.

He fancied a walk and headed down to the riverside, staying as far away from the Préfecture as possible. At Saint-Germain-des-Prés he proceeded with caution and at the corner of Rue des Saints-Pères he had to stop, as young Lapointe was standing smoking a cigarette on the pavement just a hundred metres away.

That made him smile, but also gave him a small pang. From a distance he had a look at the building that corresponded to the description in the newspaper.

'Taxi!'

He went back home. This wasn't any of his business. He was on holiday, and Pardon had insisted that it should be a real holiday.

'Have you decided what we'll do today?'

Not yet.

'Have you thought of anything?'

She hadn't, and they looked at each other, seriously at first, but then they started smiling and finally burst out laughing at the same time.

After five days of holiday, having promised themselves so many hitherto unknown pleasures, they had already reached the point where they didn't know what to do with themselves.

'Where can we go for lunch? You didn't want me to do any shopping. I can always buy some cold meats.'

He hesitated, then nodded his head. The apartment had never seemed so quiet. With its rustic furniture it brought to mind a house in a small provincial town; outside the shutters, half closed against the sun, there was a soft semi-shade.

'Off you go, then!'

He called out to her when she was already outside on the landing:

'Bring me a lobster tail.'

His favourite dish back when they had no money and lingered outside the windows of delicatessens.

He poured himself an aperitif, sat down in an armchair, unknotted his tie and smoked a pipe, musing. The heat was weighing down on him; his eyelids were twitching. He thought he could hear the voice of the young woman in Place du Tertre who was so determined to turn the Boulevard Haussmann affair into a

love story.

He wasn't so sure any more. Jave was in debt. How had he got there? Was he a gambler? Did he speculate on the stock market? Because his household was not living beyond its means, given the clientele his practice had and his wife's income.

Was he keeping a second household?

Gilbert Négrel had a fiancée who was also no doubt his mistress, since she came to see him in his bachelor's apartment.

What role did Éveline play between these two men? Why did Maigret get the feeling that she had been frustrated by both of them?

It was nothing but an intuition. He pictured her photo again: the skinny thighs, the hesitant look, which seemed to solicit indulgence or sympathy.

When he was a boy in Paray-le-Frésil he used to pity rabbits because he thought that nature had designed them to serve as food for more powerful animals.

Éveline reminded him of the rabbits. She had no defences. When she wandered the beach at Beuzec as a young woman she would have fallen into the arms of any man who showed her the slightest scrap of consideration or tenderness.

Jave had married her. She had had a child by him.

Had Négrel, as the young lover from the day before had made out, come into her life?

He finished his drink, put his pipe back between his teeth, and, when Madame Maigret got back a little later, that pipe was dangling down his chin: he had fallen asleep.

They had a real snack lunch, just like when they were young and they still lived in furnished lodgings where they weren't allowed to cook. Madame Maigret, however, was keeping a careful eye on him.

'I wonder if you'd be better off phoning Janvier.'

'Why?'

'Not to get involved in the case, but so that he can keep you up to date. At times I get the feeling you're fretting. You're not used to not knowing, to having to wait until the papers come out.'

He was tempted. It was an easy option. But Janvier would surely ask his advice. And as sure as night follows day he would end up back in his office at Quai des Orfèvres, directing the whole police operation.

'No!' he decided.

‘Why not?’

‘I can’t do that to Janvier.’

That was also true. This was Janvier’s chance to solve a sensational case all on his own. He was probably terrified, but at the same time these were the best days of his career.

‘Are you having a nap?’

He said no again, as the afternoon papers were about to appear, and he was in a hurry to know whether Lassagne had found the answer to his question.

‘Let’s go for a walk,’ he announced.

He waited patiently while she washed the dishes and was even on the point of helping her.

‘Are we going far?’

‘I don’t know yet.’

‘Don’t you think there’s going to be a storm?’

‘If it starts raining we’ll duck into a café.’

They ambled gently as far as Canal Saint-Martin, where he had often been on an investigation but where he had never come with his wife. A few large white clouds had scudded across the sky, and, to the east, there was one that was heavier than all the others, greyer in the centre, reminiscent of a boil about to burst. The air was hot and still.

He almost missed the newspaper seller reaching out a hand, and as on the previous day, he bought two rival evening papers.

‘Shall we sit somewhere and take a look?’

Madame Maigret cast a worried look at the riverside bars, which all seemed rather insalubrious to her.

‘Don’t be afraid. They are good people.’

‘All of them?’

He shrugged his shoulders. It was true that scarcely a week went by when they didn’t fish a body out of the canal. Apart from that ...

‘Do you think the glasses are clean?’

‘I’m sure they aren’t.’

‘But you drink out of them anyway?’

There were only three tables on the terrace he chose, with a view of a barge unloading bricks. Inside, a young man in a black sweater and espadrilles was leaning on the bar and speaking to the landlord in a quiet voice.

Maigret ordered a brandy for himself and a coffee for his wife, knowing she wouldn’t drink it.

He had already read about that in the morning papers, except that since then Lassagne had had time to finesse the detail by interviewing several well-known doctors. Their opinion more or less matched that of Pardon: it was possible a mistake had been made, but unlikely.

Lassagne had discovered a precedent in the newspaper's archives. It was the case of a doctor in the south of France at whose house the body of one of his patients was found, also locked in a cupboard.

In court the doctor had claimed he had made a mistake and had used the wrong phial. At the sight of the dead body, he had panicked.

'I was afraid that the maid would come into my surgery and see the body. I had done something really stupid. To give myself time to think, I shoved him into a cupboard.'

He was riddled with debts. They never discovered the patient's wallet, which contained a tidy sum, and the doctor was sent to prison.

Did Lassagne know that Jave had debts too? If he did, he didn't mention it. Instead his article introduced a new subheading:

Where was Josépha?

And so Maigret had the answer to the question he had posed that morning. Without being too conceited, he allowed himself a little smile of satisfaction, because he hadn't got it wrong, even though he had no more information to work from than any other member of the public.

Lassagne explained the issue of the two apartments and the two facing doors. Having cleaned the professional quarters in the morning, Josépha did indeed cross the landing and spend the afternoon in the other apartment. The doorbell alerted her when someone needed to get in across the landing.

On the Saturday when the events took place she was in the living quarters, where, as on every day, she had opened the window and done some dusting.

Lassagne had made more progress because Maigret's phone call had tipped him off. Three times he had tried to enter the building without being seen by the concierge. Twice she had intercepted him. On the third occasion he had managed to reach the lift without

being seen.

So it wasn't impossible that Éveline Jave had managed to go upstairs to her apartment without the knowledge of the concierge.

Could it then be deduced that Jave might have done the same and then left the building in similar fashion?

And someone, besides, had left the building with a package under their arm, because the young woman's clothes had disappeared. Had they asked the concierge whether Doctor Négrel had been carrying a package when he left?

'Do you think it was an accident?'

Madame Maigret was becoming fascinated by the affair, even though she was affecting an air of indifference.

'Anything is possible.'

'Did you read what they said to the fiancée?'

'Not yet.'

That was on page three of the paper he was reading. A photo of a nice-looking girl with an open expression wearing a spotless shirtdress. She was looking straight into the camera.

The title read:

WE ARE TO BE MARRIED IN THE AUTUMN

She didn't say, 'We were to be ...' She was an optimist, confident in herself and in her fiancé. 'We are to be ...'

Lassagne can't have slept much for four days, judging by the amount of work he was getting through.

> Yesterday evening we managed to meet with the fiancée of Doctor Négrel. We caught up with her at her house, or rather her parents' house, as she lives with them.
>
> She is Mademoiselle Martine Chapuis, the only daughter of Noël Chapuis, the famous lawyer.
>
> Neither Maître Chapuis nor his daughter had any reservation about welcoming us into their apartment in Rue du Bac, a short hop from Rue des Saints-Pères.
>
> In fact, the lawyer graciously granted us the opportunity to talk one-to-one with his daughter, thus giving her complete freedom to answer our questions.
>
> Martine Chapuis, 24, is what is known as a modern woman, in the best sense of the word. After completing her law degree, she studied philosophy for a year at the Sorbonne and then switched to medicine, in which she is now in her third year.
>
> Intelligent, with a lively curiosity, she is also an accomplished athlete: she skis each winter and is a qualified physical education instructor.

Far from being downcast at recent events, the young lady before us was brimming with confidence, almost smiling.

'It's true that Gilbert and I have been engaged for six months. We have known each other for a year. It was a few months before I introduced him to my parents, but they trust him as much as I do myself.'

'Where did you meet?'

'At Professor Lebier's house. I am on his course, and Gilbert works as his assistant.'

'Do you intend to continue with medicine and work with your husband?'

'That's our plan. I hope to assist him at least until we have children. Afterwards, we'll see how it goes.'

'Did you know Madame Jave?'

'I never met her.'

'Has your fiancé talked about her?'

'Only in passing.'

'Did he talk about her as if she was a friend?'

'You can be more direct if you wish. I know where you are going with this. What you want to know is, was Madame Jave Gilbert's lover?'

'I wouldn't dream of posing the question in such a bald way.'

'Why not? It's the question on everyone's lips. It's quite understandable. It is obvious that Gilbert had mistresses before he knew me, and I'm not sure he didn't have any afterwards. I don't get jealous about that sort of thing. As for Madame Jave, however, I'd be surprised if there was ever anything between them.'

'Why is that?'

'Because of Gilbert's character. The thing that interests him most is his work.'

'More than you?'

'Probably. He could have set up in practice years ago but he prefers the research he does with Professor Lebier. He's not interested in money. He has few needs. You've seen his apartment.'

'I know you went there.'

'I don't hide the fact. I didn't even hide it from my father. We love each other. We are getting married in the autumn. I don't see why, if I want to see him, I shouldn't go round to his place. We aren't still living in the era of chaperones. Gilbert has had mistresses, as I've already said, but he's always avoided liaisons that entail complications or are a waste of time.'

'He might have loved Éveline Jave. You can't control love.'

'In that case I would have noticed.'

'Have you made any attempt to see him since he was questioned by the police?'

'I phoned him several times. As it happens, we spend large parts of the day on the telephone. If I haven't gone round to Rue des Saints-

Pères, it is because he is trying to keep me out of this as much as possible, and there are photographers camped outside his home round the clock.'

'How did your father react?'

A brief hesitation.

'He was upset at first, since it is never pleasant, especially for a lawyer, to be mixed up either directly or indirectly in events of this kind. We had a chat about it. My father and I are great friends. He was the one who phoned Gilbert to offer his services if he needed them.'

'Did he give him advice?'

'I didn't listen to their conversation. What I do know is that if Gilbert is interrogated again by the examining magistrate, as is likely, Papa will accompany him as his lawyer.'

'Did you see your fiancé on Saturday evening? I presume you normally spend Sundays together.'

'I didn't see him on Saturday evening, because my parents and I left Paris around Saturday lunchtime to go to the country. We have a cottage in Seineport, where we stay at the weekend. Gilbert came and joined us on Sunday morning by the first train. He doesn't have a car.'

'Did he seem preoccupied?'

'He was the same as usual. We spent part of the day canoeing, and Papa, who had to be in work early on Monday morning, drove him back to Paris that evening in his car.'

'Did you ever visit your fiancé in Boulevard Haussmann?'

'Once. I happened to be in the area. I wanted to see where he worked. I enjoy getting a feel of the atmosphere around him wherever he is so that I can picture him in my mind's eye.'

'Were you seen in by Josépha?'

'By the maid, yes. I didn't know then that her name was Josépha.'

'Did you sit in the waiting room?'

'Like a patient. There were two people in front of me.'

'Did you go into any other room apart from the main consulting room?'

'I visited all the rooms.'

'Including those in the apartment?'

'No. I mean the professional rooms. The ones on the left.'

No embarrassment. No hesitation. We pressed the point:

'Including the bedroom?'

Without a blush, she looked us straight in the eye and said:

'Including the bedroom and the bathroom full of trunks.'

Maigret passed the article to his wife and watched her out of the corner of his eye as she read it, since he knew in advance which passages would cause a reaction. She didn't disappoint. Two or three times she let out a sigh. At the end, she didn't turn towards him but stared at the unloading barge.

‘What a strange girl,’ she murmured.

To tease her, he pretended not to hear. After a while she asked:

‘Do you approve?’

‘What?’

‘Didn’t you read it? The visits to Rue des Saint-Pères. The bedroom ... In my day ...’

He hesitated. He didn’t want to embarrass her, but he risked it anyway.

‘Don’t you remember? The little wood in the Chevreuse valley ...’

Martine Chapuis may not have blushed, but Madame Maigret turned beetroot red.

‘You’re not making out it’s the same thing?’

‘Why not?’

‘It was a week before we got married.’

‘For them it is two months.’

‘If they get married!’

‘If they don’t, it won’t be her fault.’

She was in a sulk for the next quarter of an hour. They were just reaching the end of the canal, walking along the bank and stopping behind every fisherman, when she finally cracked a smile, unable to sustain her grudge any longer.

‘Why did you say that?’

‘Because it’s true.’

‘And you would have told that to a journalist, as if to brag about it?’

Unable to find an answer to this, he chose instead to fill his pipe. The moment he stopped to light it large raindrops began to spatter on to the ground and on to his hat.

5. Doctor Jave's Alibi

The storm had rumbled on into the night, breaking the spell of fine weather that had lasted for more than a week. The next morning, the air was almost cold, a grey mist hung around the streets, and the sun was as pale as in February.

But it wasn't that that was making Maigret feel gloomy. Just as he was setting out to buy the newspapers, his wife had asked, as on the other mornings:

'Do you have any plans for today?'

He had said no, also as on the other days.

'Would it be all right if we had lunch at home?'

He hadn't understood what she was getting at, at first.

'Why wouldn't it be all right?'

It was then that she had said with a sigh:

'My feet are so sore. I'd like to have a rest today.'

In other words, it wasn't the lunch at the restaurant that was putting her off, but the long walks across Paris that her husband made her do afterwards. What day was it? Since he had been on holiday he hadn't bothered to keep track. It must be Friday, and she was already worn out.

'See you later,' he had muttered.

'Are you disappointed?'

'Of course not.'

'Besides, I have to sort out my dresses.'

She had been wearing a new dress every day, just to please him, and she didn't have very many summer dresses.

Fair enough! Perhaps he shouldn't have made her eat in a rather dubious bistro near Boulevard de la Chapelle and then walked her home in the rain. He had thought she was finding it fun. Every squall had soaked them to the skin. Maigret had said:

'Just imagine you're at the seaside!'

It didn't matter. She probably really did have sore feet. She had always suffered for them.

He bought his papers, seated himself at his favourite terrace, in spite of the chilly weather, and ordered his now customary coffee.

There was nothing new in the morning papers. They simply rehashed what had appeared in the previous evening's editions, only in less detail.

It felt like a blank, all of a sudden, as if the case had reached a dead end. He felt frustrated. His first thought was:

'What are they up to?'

He was thinking about Janvier and the others at Quai des Orfèvres, who were tasked with solving the case, and it was several minutes before his sense of humour reasserted itself and he started to laugh at himself.

He had just reacted like the average reader. He hadn't been fed his daily pittance and he was vexed. Along with the general public, he had been feeling for a while that the police weren't doing their job properly and he had got a better understanding of those reporters who laid siege to his door in the course of a sensational case.

'Just give us something, inspector, anything!'

He then read the rest of the paper: the weather in the various health resorts and fashionable beaches, what the film stars had been saying, road accidents and even a long article on the future of television.

The rest of the morning was uneventful. He wandered around the streets wherever his fancy took him, popping into two small bars for an aperitif. When he got home there was poulet bonne femme waiting for him, as well as an apologetic Madame Maigret, who was sorry for what she had said that morning.

'Are you annoyed?'

'About what?'

'I hope you're not thinking I'm getting bored of being with you. My feet really are ...'

'I know.'

‘But it doesn’t stop you going out somewhere.’

There was the hint of another storm in the air, or at least some rain: the sun had disappeared, and the sky was a uniform grey. He didn’t know where he was going but he went out anyway, still in a bad mood. Instead of turning left at Boulevard Voltaire, he turned right, and the rain began to fall in earnest, in broad streaks, the moment he reached Place Voltaire.

He ducked into a local café opposite the town hall, one that he knew had a billiard table in the back room, and told himself that if he found a willing partner, he wouldn’t say no to a game or two. He hadn’t been too bad at billiards in his day. He liked the way the balls moved almost intelligently when you applied the right amount of side and he also loved the click they made when they struck one another.

The two billiard tables had their dust sheets on. However, near the window, there were some groups playing belote, and Maigret sat down nearby. He observed two games simultaneously from his seat on the banquette, and one of the players never failed to look round and give him a wink whenever he had a good hand.

This was all perfectly pleasant. The eldest player must have been a retired high-ranking civil servant, as he was an officer of the Legion of Honour, and they addressed his partner as ‘professor’ – no doubt a schoolmaster.

‘Spade, spade again, and trumps …’

The retired gentleman was the only one to reach out a hand when the newspaper seller came into the café. However, he merely deposited his newspaper on the adjoining table without looking at it and turned back to his game.

There was finally some news. As Maigret had thought, the Police Judiciaire had not been idle. But it wasn’t possible to feed sensational news to the press twice in one day.

There were a number of headlines on the front page, the main one in bolder type than the others:

DOCTOR JAVE’S ALIBI

INSPECTOR JANVIER GOES TO CANNES

THE DEAD WOMAN’S JEWELS

That was a lot all at once, and Maigret turned his attention away from the game to concentrate on reading. Lassagne wrote:

> The Boulevard Haussmann affair has taken a new twist in the last twenty-four hours, and there are no doubt more surprises to come.

The credit seems to belong to Inspector Janvier, leading the case in the absence of Detective Chief Inspector Maigret, who is still on leave.

Right at the start of the investigation, letters rogatory were sent to the Flying Squad in Alpes-Maritimes, requesting that they interrogate Mademoiselle Jusserand, the nurse of little Michèle Jave, who was still at the Villa Marie-Thérèse.

What information did the Police Judiciaire derive from this? We have not been privy to it, but yesterday morning, one of our reporters posted at Quai des Orfèvres followed Inspector Janvier, who left by car in a hurry.

Our reporter shadowed him (if we might put it like that) all the way to Orly airport, where Inspector Janvier dashed on board the flight to Nice just a few moments before it took off.

We immediately contacted our correspondent on the Côte d'Azur, and that is how we have managed to stay abreast of the latest developments in the case.

As we have already said, Mademoiselle Jusserand had refused to make any comment, and the nearest the reporters could get to her was spotting her in the garden of the villa with the child.

The villa, which had been rented for six weeks by Doctor Jave, is situated a little way out of town, halfway up the Californie area. It is a yellow-painted building built around the turn of the century in the then-popular rococo style. The sizeable garden is planted with eucalyptus trees and umbrella pines.

For the last three days the local journalists as well as their photographers have been kicking their heels outside the gate, which was only opened to give access to deliveries.

On his arrival, Inspector Janvier was received along with an inspector from Cannes, and their interview with Mademoiselle Jusserand lasted more than three hours.

Mademoiselle Jusserand is a woman of around fifty, maybe older, with a severe bearing and a pale, somewhat expressionless face. Her manner is rather offputting. She worked for a long time as a nurse in a private clinic; it was there, it seems, that Doctor Jave took her on when his child was born.

She is unmarried, and from the sight of her it is difficult to imagine her ever having had a man in her life.

Our correspondent has provided us with a few details about the life the Jave family led in Cannes in the run-up to the dramatic events.

They had a large grey Pontiac with them in which they had driven down from Paris. It seems that Éveline Jave has never been at the wheel of it.

The doctor used it every morning to drive his wife, the nurse and the child to the beach. He never stayed there himself, but rather went straight off to a nearby tennis court, where he practised for two hours with an instructor.

On the beach, Éveline Jave didn't meet with anyone. She bathed with the child, then lay on the sand, always under a parasol, never exposing herself to the sun, while the nurse took care of her daughter.

The doctor came back to pick them up around midday, and they all returned to the Villa Marie-Thérèse.

Our correspondent was able to chat to the cook they had hired locally for the duration of the holiday and he asked her:

'Were they a harmonious household?'

'I've no idea.'

'Did they ever have rows?'

'I never heard any.'

'Did you ever walk in on them kissing?'

'Oh, monsieur ...!'

The doctor spent his afternoons either reading medical works at the bottom of the garden or going for walks on the Croisette, where he always had an aperitif in the bar at the Majestic.

On leaving the Villa Marie-Thérèse, Inspector Janvier looked concerned. He refused to make an announcement and headed back to the airport. But this morning in Paris, probably after consulting Examining Magistrate Coméliau, he decided to meet with journalists and gave them a few hints about what he had found out on his trip.

It was a bit like one of those famous White House press conferences, only on a smaller scale, of course, with everyone asking questions. The inspector didn't answer all of them.

First of all, in a few words, here is how Jave and his wife spent the few hours before the latter's death. This is according to the account of Mademoiselle Jusserand.

On Friday, around nine in the evening, while her husband was out taking a walk in the neighbourhood, Éveline Jave called Paris and had quite a long conversation.

Inspector Janvier did not conceal the fact that they had traced the number that was requested, and it turned out to be that of Doctor Négrel's lodgings in Rue des Saints-Pères.

A little later, Madame Jave told her nurse:

'I'll be away all day tomorrow. I'll be seeing a friend in Saint-Tropez.'

And she gave her a few instructions to do with the house.

She probably told her husband the same thing. She had to catch the railcar that left Cannes at 8.10 and ordered a taxi to take her to the station.

At this point we encounter a complete reversal of the situation. It had been stated earlier that Jave set off on his wife's trail and that he missed the 9.15 flight from Nice and then took a flight to London in order to catch up with her as soon as possible.

Mademoiselle Jusserand's statement demolishes this theory and reveals the doctor from Boulevard Haussmann in a new light.

Jave did indeed leave the Villa Marie-Thérèse shortly after his wife as if he had been waiting for the coast to be clear. He drove to the airport in his car, where he missed the Paris flight by a mere two or three minutes.

He didn't ask anyone at the airport about his wife. According to the nurse, he was at this point completely unaware that his wife was on the plane and really believed that she was seeing a friend in Saint-Tropez.

So in fact it was he who was taking advantage of his wife's absence to go off on an escapade.

And escapade is the right word, as the police were able subsequently to verify.

Maigret had to turn the page of his paper and as he did so he mechanically watched a hand of the card game. On the third page there was another headline:

THE SECRET LIFE OF DOCTOR JAVE

We can't do better than reproduce some of the questions and replies from the press conference Inspector Janvier held in his office, or rather the office of Detective Chief Inspector Maigret, in which he has installed himself.

Maigret gave an involuntary flinch.

'Was Mademoiselle Jusserand willing to talk?'

'No. In fact, getting her to respond was like pulling teeth.'

'Did she strike you as someone who was devoted to her employers?'

'I got the feeling she hated all men.'

'What was her relationship with Madame Jave like?'

'I don't think she liked her.'

'In short, she didn't like anyone?'

'Just the child, whom she thought belonged to her in a way, and herself. She has a very high opinion of herself.'

'Is she the sort of woman who listens at keyholes?'

At this point Janvier had come out with a tendentious comment that would annoy millions of female readers.

'Don't all women listen at doors?'

'Is her evidence trustworthy?'

'Up until now we have been able to verify everything she said, or almost.'

'Was the doctor having an affair in Paris?'

'Yes. More than an affair, in fact. You might even call it a grand passion.'

'Did his wife know about it?'

'Officially, no.'

'But Mademoiselle Jusserand was in the know?'

'Apparently.'

'Anyone else?'

'Josépha.'

'Why?'

'Because Jave's lover was Antoinette, her daughter, who lives in Rue Washington, just a short distance from the apartment in Boulevard Haussmann.'

'And Josépha was happy to go along with this?'

‘Yes.’

Inspector Janvier then filled in the whole sorry tale. About two years ago, Antoinette Chauvet, Josépha’s daughter, who was working as a shop assistant on the Grands Boulevards, started showing symptoms of tuberculosis, and Doctor Jave offered to take her in his care.

It is worth mentioning in passing that the girl has a strong physical resemblance to Madame Jave: like her, she is rather thin, with a tired-looking face and fearful eyes.

Jave got into the habit of going to see her at Rue Washington. As she needed complete rest he helped to support her and even sent her off for two months in the country.

When she returned, the visits continued, and two years later they are still happening.

Because of this situation certain people have described her as a girl of loose morals. Indeed, after she was cured, she didn’t go back to work, and whenever he had a spare moment between visits, Doctor Jave dashed over to Rue Washington.

‘Even when Josépha was there?’

‘Even when Josépha was there. As far as she is concerned, Jave is some sort of demigod who is entitled to whatever he likes.’

‘So on Saturday it was Antoinette Chauvet he was rushing to see?’

‘The concierge in Rue Washington has confirmed it, as she saw him arrive no more than three-quarters of an hour after the plane from London landed at Orly.’

‘How long did he stay?’

‘Wait a minute. Josépha wasn’t there at the time, so we only have Antoinette’s evidence to go on. According to her, Jave didn’t set off from Rue Washington until seven o’clock in the evening, leaving just enough time, given how much traffic there was at that hour, to catch the 7.55 train at Gare de Lyon.’

‘And Josépha?’

‘She still maintains that she left Boulevard Haussmann shortly after Doctor Négrel, at around six o’clock, and went to see her daughter.’

‘Where she found Jave?’

‘Yes.’

‘And she stayed with the pair of them until seven o’clock?’

‘That’s what she says.’

‘So Jave has an alibi?’

Inspector Janvier wasn’t so certain. Given how devoted both Antoinette and her mother were towards the doctor, their evidence can surely be regarded as suspect. On the other hand, the concierge, who saw Jave arrive, didn’t see him leave. However, around this time she was out at a local grocer’s, and her lodge was empty for about fifteen to twenty minutes.

Assuming Philippe Jave left Rue Washington around seven o’clock, did that leave him enough time to run to Boulevard Haussmann, kill

his wife, lock her in a cupboard and dash off to Gare de Lyon?

It's unlikely, but a reconstruction is due to take place today that will throw light on this.

Maigret was worried. There was something here that just didn't add up. Hadn't Pardon said that Jave was up to his ears in debt and living close to his limit?

Antoinette, in her small apartment in Rue Washington, couldn't be that expensive to maintain.

He also felt a bit jealous, jealous of Janvier, not because of his success, but for a silly reason. Every time an investigation at the Police Judiciaire incurred certain costs, such as travel, they had to fight a battle with the accountants, who went through every expense claim with a fine-tooth comb.

How had Janvier managed to swing a flight to Cannes? They must be attaching a singular importance to this case, that they should have loosened the purse strings so much.

THE WIFE'S JEWELS

Occasionally one of the card players would watch him, and one even leaned over to have a glance at what he was reading.

'Is it Jave?'

'They don't know yet.'

'My money's on him.'

If he had read the rest of the article, he might not have been so sure.

Inspector Janvier's trip to Cannes brought to light another piece of information no less surprising than the first.

For several days the rumour has been circulating that the Javes, despite their apparent affluence, were in financial dire straits and that Doctor Jave was in debt.

The first thought that came to mind was that Jave was leading a double life, probably with an expensive mistress, since he didn't gamble and didn't speculate on the stock market.

What was the pit into which Madame Jave's considerable income as well as his own respectable fees were disappearing?

Once again, Madame Jusserand held the key to the enigma.

Did she do it out of female vengefulness or quite innocently? That's not for us to judge. The fact is that, as Inspector Janvier was taking his leave, she asked him:

'Would you mind taking the jewellery case back with you? I'm here on my own with the child and the cook and I don't want to be responsible for it.'

'Where is it?'

‘In madame’s room. She always takes it with her when she travels, and I am surprised she left it here.’

It was more like a small trunk, made by a well-known saddler in Faubourg Saint-Honoré. As you might expect, the case was locked.

‘I know where to find the key,’ Mademoiselle Jusserand declared. Clearly she knows a lot of things.

She pointed him to a drawer in a chest, where the key had been slid under a pile of underwear.

Inspector Janvier made no secret of his surprise at the sight of the jewels in the case. They have not been valued, but at first sight there appeared to be around 30 million francs’ worth: rings, necklaces, bracelets, clips and earrings, all from the best establishments in Rue de la Paix.

And now you will realize why we talked earlier of a reversal of the situation.

The expectation was that Doctor Jave, whose wife appeared so simple and modest on the surface, would turn out to have a mistress with expensive tastes.

But now all of a sudden it seems that it was his wife who was the drain on their budget, while his mistress was happy to live in quiet obscurity.

We managed to put in a phone call to the brother of the victim, Yves Le Guérec. He was still at the Hôtel Scribe and he made no secret of the reason for his extended stay in Paris.

He intended to take his sister’s remains to Concarneau for burial in the family vault.

But as Jave was her husband, the decision was his to make.

‘Have you asked him?’

‘I haven’t been able either to see him or to speak to him on the telephone. I wrote to him, or rather, I had my lawyer write to him, because I want no contact with that man, and we haven’t yet received any reply.’

Will the husband and the brother be locking horns over the corpse?

When we got in contact with Le Guérec, he was not up to date with the discovery of the jewels. We asked him:

‘Was your sister a stylish dresser?’

‘Not enough so, in my opinion. Despite her wealth, she has always refused to wear fashions by the top designers, and she even made some of her clothes herself.’

‘Did she like jewels?’

‘She didn’t really wear them. When my mother died, the family jewels were divided up between her and my wife. They weren’t of any great value, mostly old-fashioned pieces. Éveline let my wife take her pick without being overly bothered.’

‘Yet she possessed jewellery to the value of 30 million francs.’

‘What did you say?’

‘I said 30 million francs.’

‘Who told you that?’

‘The jewels were found in Cannes.’

At the other end of the line, Le Guérec’s tone of voice changed:

‘What are you getting at?’

‘Nothing. I just wondered whether you knew this, whether your sister had a passion for diamonds, rubies and emeralds when she was younger.’

‘Nothing wrong with that, is there?’

‘Of course not.’

‘And I would like to point out that, with her share of the proceeds from the factory, she could afford it without having to ask her husband for anything. It was her money, wasn’t it?’

‘Sort of, yes ...’

‘In that case, I don’t see why anyone should be trying to find out what she did with it. If she chose to spend it on jewellery, that’s her business.’

‘Naturally.’

And at this Yves Le Guérec abruptly put the phone down.

Around midday we went over to Rue Washington, where the pavement was crammed with photographers.

The building where Antoinette Chauvet has her apartment on the fourth floor is quite old, but in decent condition. The lift didn’t work, so we took the stairs, but when we were directed to her door and knocked, no one answered.

A neighbour’s door opened, and an elderly woman with grey hair, dressed in black, told us:

‘If you’re looking for Mademoiselle Chauvet, she’s not at home.’

‘Has she been out long?’

‘Two days.’

‘You haven’t seen her for two days?’

‘No. Only her mother has been here – twice – but she has a key.’

‘Do you know if the young lady had any bags with her when she left?’

‘You call that a lady? Someone who is visited by married men?’

‘Why do you say “men”? Was there more than one?’

‘If she received one she could have received others, that’s how I see it. And when a mother can go along with things like that, I reckon ...’

We didn’t get to hear the full considered opinion of Joséphа’s neighbour, because, choking with indignation, she had to beat a hasty retreat, slamming the door in our faces.

Where is Antoinette Chauvet? Was she on the run from all the journalists and photographers?

The police must know, since they have been able to question her, but when we telephoned Inspector Janvier to find out her current whereabouts, he told us that there was no reason to disturb her at the present time.

So as you see, it is difficult to summarize the situation. The affair,

instead of sorting itself out, is actually becoming more confused.

There are a number of questions which are currently impossible to answer:

Did Éveline Jave know about her husband's affair?

Why did she ring Doctor Négrel at his home on Friday evening? (It is worth noting that this telephone call would seem to confirm the statement of the concierge in Rue des Saints-Pères, who claimed to have seen the young woman visiting her tenant on at least two occasions.)

Why, after pretending to visit a friend in Saint-Tropez, did Madame Jave take the plane to Paris?

Did Éveline and Gilbert Négrel meet? Were Antoinette Chauvet and Josépha in collusion to protect Doctor Jave, and did he really not have enough time to get to Boulevard Haussmann before catching the night train?

Finally, why had Éveline Jave, who had no interest in clothes and who didn't wear jewellery, amassed a whole collection with an almost pathological frenzy?

Maigret folded up the newspaper with a sigh and summoned the waiter to order another drink. His neighbour asked him:

'Is it him?'

'They still don't know.'

'Trust me, young people are rarely jealous enough to kill. It's men of your age and mine who get the red mist.'

Maigret tried to suppress his smile. The card player had no inkling that he was talking to a man who had had to deal with every crime of passion in Paris for the last thirty years.

However, even if he had known, he probably would have been no less sure of his opinion. The less knowledge or experience some people have to back it up, the more certain they are that they know what they are talking about.

'Same again, waiter.'

He squinted at the two billiard tables; he had an almost childlike desire to play. There was a little old man sitting opposite who looked like he might enjoy a game or two, but he was reading his paper and drinking a café crème, and Maigret didn't have the nerve to disturb him.

Janvier was doing well. Maigret could make sense now of his comings and goings and could see where his investigation was heading. They were probably questioning Doctor Jave again, either at Quai des Orfèvres or at Boulevard Haussmann.

Maigret would have given anything to be conducting this

interrogation himself. He would also have liked to have half an hour face to face with Mademoiselle Jusserand, the misanthropic nurse who, of her own free will, without being asked, had revealed the secret of the jewels.

Joséphа didn't pose a problem for him. He had known lots like her, hard-working widows who had paid obeisance to traditional morality their whole lives but who, when it came to their daughters, were suddenly completely indulgent.

Lassagne had written that in her eyes Jave was a demigod. That was understandable. He had saved her daughter's life. In the beginning he must have taken care of her with an almost fatherly tenderness.

Nor was it surprising that Jave should have fallen in love with a woman who resembled his wife. That often happens. Most men are attracted to a particular type.

Perhaps that only went to prove that the doctor had not married for money, back in Concarneau, but for love.

He had found himself in the presence of a frail young woman, closed in on herself, leading a joyless life.

Did Éveline turn out to be different from what he expected? Was there a clue in this amassing of jewellery like provisions in an anthill?

By chance, three years later, he would encounter another young woman, weak and sickly too, living under threat of illness, like the first one.

Is it so strange that he should feel the same connection with her as he had felt the first time?

He had set off for Cannes with his family, leaving Antoinette in Paris. His wife announced that she was going to spend the day, perhaps even the following night, with a friend in Saint-Tropez.

Hadn't he taken advantage of this to rush to the airport in order to spend a few hours with Antoinette?

It all made sense. There were some possible objections to this hypothesis, but they could all be answered.

If that was how it was, he had no reason to go to Boulevard Haussmann. Not as long as Négrel was there, at least. After six o'clock, the coast would be clear.

But what would he have gone there for?

On the other hand, why, since he had come by plane, did he not return by plane? This would have got him back to Nice that same

evening, which would have meant Éveline would have been unaware of his escapade, assuming he believed she really was in Saint-Tropez.

Among the various questions he had asked, Lassagne had slipped in:

Did Éveline Jave know about her husband's affair?

But he had forgotten to ask another, equally plausible question: did Doctor Jave know about the relationship between his wife and his locum?

For they did have a relationship on some level, since Madame Jave had telephoned the young doctor on Friday evening.

The concierge's testimony was no longer in doubt. She had visited Rue des Saints-Pères on at least two occasions.

If Jave did know that his wife was in Paris and not in Saint-Tropez, then he hadn't missed his flight, he had simply elected to take a different one.

What was Janvier going to do now? Maigret could imagine Coméliau frothing with impatience and insisting that they arrest Doctor Négrel.

It was still raining. There was still no one to play billiards with. Maigret paid for his drinks, nodded vaguely in the direction of the card players and left with his hands thrust into his pockets.

He thought that, in Janvier's shoes ...

The rain wasn't too heavy, and he walked as far as Place de la République without realizing it, went into his morning café, ordered a beer and a pen and paper and started writing in block capitals, as he had the previous time.

His message was as brief as the first one, and it too was addressed to Janvier:

IF I WERE YOU I'D GO TO CONCARNEAU

After all, management were so generous in paying for the flight to Nice!

6. The Trip to Concarneau

Maigret's anonymous note didn't even have time to reach Quai des Orfèvres before someone else decided to make the trip to Concarneau, and he did so in attention-grabbing fashion. Prior to this, there had been a major development, but Maigret would only learn of it at the same time as the general public.

In the end, he had returned home to Boulevard Richard-Lenoir in the rain. Just like in a holiday hotel in bad weather, he had asked:

'What shall we do?'

'Whatever you want.'

It was only five o'clock in the afternoon, and they had the rest of the day to fill.

'Why don't we go to the cinema?'

That would be the second time in one week, something they hadn't done for years and years. This time, however, as a special treat, they eschewed their local cinema and headed up town on the Métro to one of the large cinemas on the Champs-Élysées.

It was there that, following the newsreel and the documentary, there was a long silence, after which they projected on to the screen a newsflash they must have hurriedly written on to a glass slide, as they did during elections or at times of great disasters.

> Latest:
> The Boulevard Haussmann affair
> Doctor Gilbert Négrel arrested today at his home

It was quite dramatic, in that huge cinema, which was only about a third full, after the moving images and their musical soundtrack, to

see nothing but that static message which seemed to emanate from some old-fashioned magic lantern. The audience shuffled nervously in their seats. Some people coughed here and there and began whispering.

The screen then went to white, though still illuminated, and the message was replaced by a photo of the young doctor. He wasn't on his own. He was part of a group of doctors in white gowns standing in the courtyard of a hospital. A cross marked under one of the figures in the group indicated the man whom Coméliau had just dispatched to the cells on an indictment of murder.

Then the image disappeared, to be replaced by another, the photo that the papers had already published of Éveline Jave in her austere swimming-costume on the beach in Brittany. Someone shouted from the darkness of the auditorium:

'That's enough!'

An elderly gentleman sitting behind Maigret muttered:

'I knew it was him.'

The screen went dark again, and it was a relief to hear the musical prelude to the main feature and see the opening titles appear.

Maigret was not as relieved as everyone else, because, even though he tried to concentrate on the film playing out before him, his thoughts were elsewhere, at Quai des Orfèvres, where he could picture Négrel in his office – since it was in his office that Janvier had installed himself.

At points in the film Madame Maigret slid her hand into his, as if she understood, and when the audience filtered out of the cinema she didn't ask any questions or make any comments.

The streetlights were on, and the Champs-Élysées was swinging into evening mode. Like hundreds, perhaps thousands of others they stood there wondering what restaurant they should go to for dinner. In the end, to avoid walking too far, they chose a vast establishment that specialized in fish and seafood and were seated at a tiny table where Maigret didn't have enough room for his legs.

It wasn't until the next morning that he discovered the rest, when he opened his morning papers in Place de la République. The rain had given way to wind.

MAÎTRE CHAPUIS AT CONCARNEAU

As was announced on the radio yesterday, Examining Magistrate Coméliau decided early yesterday afternoon to place Doctor Négrel

under arrest, and Inspector Janvier, accompanied by his colleague Lapointe, duly went to Rue des Saints-Pères around three o'clock.

They found the young doctor in the company of his fiancée, Martine Chapuis, and his future father-in-law, the lawyer Noël Chapuis.

All three seemed calm and appeared to be expecting this latest development.

As they crossed the pavement to the waiting police car, Doctor Négrel paused for a moment to allow the photographers to take pictures and, as is evident on our photo here, he had a smile on his face that was at once bitter and yet confident.

Maître Chapuis accompanied him in the car. As for Martine Chapuis, left alone at the mercy of the journalists, she simply stated:

'I have nothing to worry about. Gilbert is innocent.'

The interrogation at the Police Judiciaire lasted a mere forty minutes, after which, without handcuffs, still looking self-possessed, almost serene, Négrel was led away by two inspectors to the cells at the Palais de Justice.

To the gaggle of journalists in the corridor of the Police Judiciaire, Maître Chapuis announced:

'I am more confident than ever. In order to defend my client I need to uncover the truth, and I know that I will. This evening I will be taking the train to Concarneau.'

'So you think the truth lies in Concarneau, Maître Chapuis?'

The lawyer merely gave a non-committal shrug, but he didn't deny this.

So that is why, at 7.35 in the evening, half a dozen reporters were at Gare Montparnasse to take the same train as Doctor Négrel's defence lawyer.

The lawyer and the journalists travelled together in the one compartment and arrived at the Breton port this morning.

Maybe it was just a coincidence, but Yves Le Guérec, the victim's brother, was travelling in a different carriage of the same train. He had no contact with the first group.

For his part, Doctor Jave has not emerged from his apartment in Boulevard Haussmann, where Josépha is looking after him. The telephone is still dead. Around six o'clock, Inspector Lapointe, the youngest officer in the Police Judiciaire, paid him a visit and spent nearly two hours with him. On leaving, he made no comment.

According to unverified reports, Antoinette Chauvet is said to be staying in a hotel, the location of which is known only to the police and probably her mother and Doctor Jave.

In his impatience Maigret almost rang Quai des Orfèvres. He was finding it increasingly difficult being a simple member of the public. He could sense that the investigation was picking up momentum, that the truth was close to being discovered, and he chafed at having to wait for the news to filter through.

It had disturbed him the previous evening at the cinema to see that almost indecent display of the two photographs.

They had lunch in the neighbourhood, he and Madame Maigret, in a restaurant near the Bastille whose regulars were mostly away on holiday and which the tourists didn't know about, so consequently the place was three-quarters empty.

The owner came to shake his hand.

'I thought you were on holiday, inspector.'

'I am.'

'In Paris?'

'Shush!'

'Have you come back for the Boulevard Haussmann affair?'

He should never have come to such a familiar place.

'My wife and I are just passing through. We'll be setting off again very soon.'

'What's your opinion? Was it the younger one?'

'I've no idea.'

It depended on a whole number of things about which he didn't have the foggiest clue! Did Janvier have information which he hadn't passed on to the press? It was possible, and that annoyed Maigret. He couldn't resist trying to solve the problem, but he didn't have all the cards in his hand.

When, a little later, they sat down at a terrace on Place de la Bastille, not having gone to the effort to venture further afield, Madame Maigret remarked:

'I wonder how they manage in London and New York.'

'What do you mean?'

'Apparently they don't have terraces.'

It was true that they had spent a large portion of their week sitting on café terraces. Maigret was keeping an eye out for the papers. Two prostitutes, still quite young, were walking the street outside a furnished lodging-house.

'You see, there are still some about.'

And she didn't react when her husband replied:

'I should hope so!'

A boy appeared with a clutch of newspapers under his arm. Maigret already had the change in his hand.

In his now habitual fashion, he passed one of the papers to his wife and unfolded the other, the one Lassagne wrote for.

Firstly, Lassagne recounted the arrest of Gilbert Négrel in similar terms to the morning papers, adding only a single new detail: the doctor was carrying what seemed to be a pre-packed suitcase when he left. Martine Chapuis had insisted on carrying the case downstairs.

It appeared that Maître Chapuis had deliberately announced his trip to Concarneau in such a public way with the ulterior motive of dragging the press along for the ride.

Was it to create a diversion, or did he really have a plan in mind? Something suggested by his future son-in-law?

In any case, the small army had invaded the Hôtel de l'Amiral on Quai Carnot, which Maigret was familiar with from a case he had worked on some time back, one that had created a bit of a stir.

In his usual style, Lassagne started by painting a picture of the town, the port and the ramparts of the old town.

> The sun has been shining for the last two days, apparently, but we were greeted by a north-westerly gale. The sky is low and dark. The clouds are almost clipping the rooftops, and the sea is rough, even inside the port, where the tuna trawlers are being shunted against one another.
>
> And when it comes to the Boulevard Haussmann case too, the climate here is very different compared with Paris. You can sense the smouldering passions, that the people here have already taken sides, for or against.
>
> And we don't mean for or against Doctor Jave or Doctor Négrel. No, people are coming out for or against Éveline Jave, and indeed, the entire Le Guérec family.
>
> There was a significant incident at the railway station. As we were getting off the train with Maître Chapuis, Yves Le Guérec stepped down from another carriage and looked as if he was waiting for our group. He was waiting for us, in fact, and this wasn't at all the same man we had met at the Hôtel Scribe in Paris.
>
> His tone was harder, more clipped. He addressed us in the middle of the flow of passengers:
>
> 'Gentlemen, I have no idea what you have come here to find, but I give due warning that I will sue for defamation any one of you who makes slanderous remarks about my sister or my family.'
>
> Hand on heart, we can say that no one has given us such a warning before in the course of our career, and it will not prevent us from carrying out our professional duty.
>
> Having wandered around the town for a couple of hours, we have come to understand Yves Le Guérec's aggressive attitude.

The Le Guérecs are part of an upper-middle-class clan of factory-owners and ship-owners who form a small clique which has little contact with the rest of the town's inhabitants.

We have seen the Le Guérecs' family home on Boulevard Bougainville, facing the sea, and we think it explains quite a lot. It is an enormous building in neo-gothic style, with a tower and windows reminiscent of a convent or a church. The stone is quite dark. Probably not much sunlight penetrates its rooms with their exposed ceiling beams.

This was where the future Madame Jave spent her childhood and adolescence. In fact, the Le Guérecs lived in the house until their father's death, when Yves built himself a modern villa next to the beach at Les Sables Blancs.

We have seen the factory too. You can smell it 200 metres away, and in high season some 300 women aged fourteen to eighty-two work there.

Why is the contrast between the owners and the common people so much more marked in this small town than anywhere else? Is it the weather, the overcast sky, the wind and the rain that gave us this impression?

We spoke to fishermen on the quayside, we went into shops and bars. We listened. We asked questions.

Of course, everyone is sorry for Éveline Jave, and no one rejoices in her death, but nevertheless we heard people say:

'It was bound to happen one day.'

It wasn't easy to get anyone to expand on this. The people here are suspicious of outsiders, especially journalists. Moreover, most of them depend on the Le Guérecs for their living, or at least on other factory- and ship-owners who are part of their set.

However, one little old woman, whom we met in a grocer's, with a black shawl wrapped tightly round her chest, did open up to us, despite the glances directed at her by the shopkeeper to try to shut her up.

'That poor doctor could have had no idea what he was letting himself in for. He came here from Paris, he was on holiday. He believed everything he was told. If only he had looked into it a bit harder, he would have heard a thing or two about this young lady. First of all, he would have found out about Monsieur Lemaire, the dentist, who was such a nice young man.'

In spite of the threats from Yves Le Guérec, we feel duty bound to tell this story, which was confirmed by a person who is in a position to know, whose name we cannot divulge.

Éveline was sixteen at the time, and rumour has it that this was not her first liaison. She received the attentions of a certain Doctor Alain Lemaire, a dentist whose surgery was opposite the post office, who had been married for five years and had two children.

'It wasn't to get her teeth seen to that she visited him every day

during that winter,' the old woman told us. 'She'd wait out on the square until he'd finished seeing his patients. I saw her with my own eyes, pressed against a wall, watching the lights on the first floor. Another time, I saw them together in Doctor Lemaire's car. She was leaning against him, and I don't know how he managed to drive the car.

'Madame Lemaire discovered them in a position that left no room for doubt. She is a proud woman. She started slapping the girl and then threw her out. For at least the next hour you could hear the sound of an argument coming from the apartment.

'She left and took the children with her. A few weeks later, living with her parents in Rennes, she asked for a divorce.

'The whole of Concarneau knew about it. The Le Guérecs were aware of this, and it got right up their nose. They put the girl in a convent for six months, I don't know where, but she managed to come home again in the end.

'It was the poor dentist who had to leave, because they were accusing him of corrupting girls.

'And he wasn't the only one. I can tell you about other married men, respectable, decent men, who she chased after. It was something stronger than her.

'They tried to marry her off, but no one from round here would have her. There was a young solicitor from Rennes who visited their house quite often for a while, but once he was put in the picture he never came back.

'You can imagine what a godsend it was when a doctor from Paris became infatuated with her.'

Madame Maigret, sitting next to him, must more or less have been reading about the same events, in different words, because she looked somewhat shocked.

'Do you believe it?'

He chose not to reply, as he knew his wife didn't always like to stare reality fully in the face. After all these years living with him, she still subscribed to the image of the world that she had formed in her childhood. Or rather, she clung on to it, without fully believing in it.

'At sixteen!' she sighed.

'It seems that she started even younger.'

'But you saw her photo.'

Lassagne continued:

Doctor Lemaire, who is the only person who could confirm this story, is now based in Morocco, and his wife, who has remarried by all accounts, is said to be living in the South.

We have tried to trace some of Éveline's childhood friends and have

found three of her former classmates, two of whom are now married and have children. The third, who works in the offices of a ship-owner who is friends with the Le Guérecs, replied sharply:

'It's a pack of lies. Besides, it's none of your business.'

When we interviewed one of the other two, her husband was present, and he wouldn't allow her to answer our questions.

'Don't get involved. You know it can't lead to anything good. Plus, it's not the journalists' job to conduct an investigation – that's for the police.'

His wife was silent, reluctantly, we thought, as she seemed to have a lot on her mind.

So only one of the three talked to us openly, and she carried on with her housework as she did so.

'Everyone at primary school and at the lycée knew that Éveline was ill and that she could die at any given moment. She told us herself, and we were warned that we had to take good care of her. She knew this. She said:

' "I have to make the most of life. I don't know if I'll live until I'm twenty."

'She didn't join in our games. At playtime she would sit on her own in the corner, daydreaming. One day – she must have been fourteen – she told me quite calmly:

' "I'm in love."

'She gave me the name of a well-known man in town, a man in his forties whom we bumped into almost every afternoon as we left school.

' "He doesn't pay any attention to me, because he thinks I'm just a little girl, but I intend to have him."

'She got into the habit of being the last to leave school, so that she could walk through the streets on her own. It was December, if I remember correctly. It got dark early.

'A month after that she told me:

' "I've done it."

' "Done what?"

' "What I said."

' "You've ...?"

' "Not the whole way, but almost. I've been to his house."

'He was a bachelor who was, and still is, something of a lothario. I didn't believe Éveline. And I told her so.

' "Fine. Tomorrow, all you have to do is follow me."

'So I did. He was waiting for her at a street corner, and they walked together to a house, into which they disappeared, and I saw lights being turned on and curtains being closed.

' "So, was I lying?" she asked me the next day.

' "No."

' "Before this week is out, I'll be a real woman."

'She didn't talk to me about it again, but a month later I saw her

leaving that same house.

'I know there were others. However, she was more discreet about them. It's not her fault. She's sick, isn't she?'

According to Lassagne, there was another school of thought, that of Éveline's defenders, and some even saw a political slant to all this.

Maître Chapuis' arrival has raised feelings to a fever pitch. Barely had he settled into his room at the hotel when the phone began ringing off the hook with people wanting to offer their advice, anonymously or otherwise.

What is certain is that, if the information we have gathered and the rumours we have repeated here despite the threats from Le Guérec turn out to be true, then the Boulevard Haussmann affair will take on a whole new complexion.

What Maigret would have liked was the answers to two questions:

Did Éveline Jave know about the affair between her husband and Josépha's daughter?

Did Doctor Jave know about his wife's relationship with Doctor Négrel?

Had Janvier, in his office back at Quai des Orfèvres, found the answers to these questions?

Maigret remembered another question, which he had asked himself on the first day:

Why had Éveline Jave been naked when she was found in the cupboard, and why had her clothes disappeared?

It was a like a three-handed vaudeville revue, with the difference that one person had lost her life, and another was about to lose his head, or at least his liberty.

'Do you think it's necessary to talk about all that?'

It was necessary either to talk about everything or not to mention anything at all.

'If what the paper says is true, she's just an unfortunate girl, more to be pitied than blamed.'

He knew already that his wife was going to say that. She continued, after a silence:

'That's no reason to kill someone, especially in such a cowardly way.'

She wasn't wrong, of course. But who had killed her? And why? It was this 'why' that intrigued him the most.

It was only by getting to know Éveline better that they would finally understand the motives of her murderer.

In the last few years, two years at least, she had in some way been caught between two men: her husband on one side, Doctor Négrel on the other.

Even assuming that both had loved her at some point, neither of them loved her any more on the Saturday when she died.

Philippe Jave, for reasons Maigret was unaware of, but which he believed he could find out, had gradually drifted apart from her and fallen in love with Antoinette Chauvet.

Gilbert Négrel had become engaged to a young woman who seemed tailor-made for him.

Did Éveline know? Had he told her about it in order to break off with her?

And what indeed was the nature of their relationship?

The information gathered in Concarneau now gave some insight into this. Éveline didn't wait for a man to court her. It was she who made the first move.

'I intend to have him!' she had said while still a teenager to her friend, referring to a forty-year-old man.

And she did have him.

When Négrel started to frequent Boulevard Haussmann, had she also said: 'I intend to have him!'?

Her husband, who was already in love with Antoinette at this point, probably let her go. He would have gone out on a call in the evening, leaving Éveline and Négrel alone together.

Négrel had not yet met the daughter of Maître Chapuis. Studious and hard-working, he had only ever had casual encounters before this.

This was all entirely plausible. He knew nothing about the past of the young wife, who came across as so well-behaved yet seemed defenceless against what life threw at her.

There was something both ironic and tragic about this situation.

Éveline, who had an urgent desire to live life to the full, to live fast, to absorb everything she could of existence, was alone between two men, both of whom loved someone else.

Her husband had Antoinette – who looked like her!

Négrel had Martine Chapuis, as determined to marry him as Eveline had earlier been to have the older man in Concarneau.

She had nothing left, except her jewels, since her child doesn't seem to have occupied an important place in her life, and it was mainly the nurse who looked after her.

This accumulation of jewellery that she never wore also cast a strange light on her character.

Did she collect them in this fashion out of avarice, as do certain women who say that it is a nest egg that they can fall back on whatever might happen?

Maigret had seen none of the characters in this drama in the flesh. He had only got to know them through the papers. Nevertheless, he had the impression that he wasn't far wrong in thinking that these jewels constituted a sort of revenge.

If he could have rung Quai des Orfèvres, he would have asked Janvier:

'When was it that she started buying or acquiring jewels?'

He would swear that it was around the time that Jave began his adventure with Antoinette, or at least at the moment when Éveline discovered that she was no longer loved.

She was still a Le Guérec in spite of everything. It was her money, Le Guérec money, that had enabled her husband to set up in Boulevard Haussmann and to become a society doctor.

Had she not bought him? Moreover, wasn't the Le Guérec income the main source of revenue for the household?

He didn't love her. He had a mistress. He was paying the rent on the apartment in Rue Washington. He kept Josépha's daughter, who didn't have a job.

In her mind, wasn't that also Le Guérec money?

So she started spending money too. And to spend more quickly, to spend in larger quantities, she bought herself jewellery or demanded her husband buy it.

Janvier would be able to verify all this by checking the bank accounts. He would also know whether Éveline's share of the earnings from the factory was paid directly to her or to her husband.

Regular visitors to Boulevard Haussmann didn't suspect a thing. Nor did the doctor's patients. He was treading on thin ice.

Did he have any right to say 'No' to his wife's demands?

He loved Antoinette, sought consolation with her for his broken marriage. Did he regard it as a price worth paying to be left in peace?

Négrel's situation was scarcely much better than his. He hadn't rejected Éveline's advances. She had moved him. He had become her lover.

What had he found out that had estranged him from her in his turn?

He had met Martine, and they had planned a future life together.

Only, as far as could be established, Éveline wouldn't let him go. She pursued him back to Rue des Saints-Pères. She telephoned him from Cannes. She dashed to the airport to come and see him on Saturday.

What did she want, what did she require from him?

She was becoming a pitiful figure in this quest for an impossible happiness. Even after his divorce, the dentist in Concarneau had left town without a backward glance at her. The others had taken advantage of the pleasure she offered them and then had hastily put an end to the liaison.

She was like someone who, having fallen into a fast-flowing river, was clinging in vain to disintegrating pieces of flotsam.

Love eluded her. Happiness eluded her. But, haunted by her own mortality, she doggedly continued to pursue them.

It had ended with a body bent double and stuffed into a cupboard.

According to the pathologist she had been struck, or else thrown against a piece of furniture or the corner of a wall. The bruising pointed to a violent altercation.

Was it to do with jealousy?

Since the previous day, Philippe Jave had had an alibi, but it was a dubious one, as it had been furnished by Antoinette and Joséphа.

Négrel had spent Saturday afternoon at Boulevard Haussmann, and for most of that time Joséphа had been in the apartment opposite.

Had Éveline been undressed before or after her death?

If it was before, then it was a fair assumption that Négrel had succumbed and that the couple had gone into the bedroom that is located behind the consulting room.

Had they had a row? Had Éveline threatened to prevent him marrying his fiancée? Had he hit her and then, frightened, given her an injection? In that case, did he pick out the wrong phial or did he knowingly choose a drug that he was aware would kill her?

Both versions were possible. Both were explicable. And also that he should have hidden the body in the cupboard, tidied up the room and then at the last moment spotted the clothes on the floor or over the back of a chair and taken them away to destroy them.

It was harder to imagine that Jave would have arrived from Cannes, gone to see his mistress, then made his way to Boulevard Haussmann, where he had undressed her in order to make love.

If he was the one who had killed her, the circumstances must have been different. But in what way? Had he planned all this in advance in a cynical, even scientific fashion? For example, had Jave, who had long wished to get rid of Éveline in order to gain both his liberty and her fortune, followed her to Paris, swung by Rue Washington to establish an alibi, turned up at Boulevard Haussmann after his locum had left and then executed his plan?

One thing was clear, unless what the newspapers had printed about the keys was not the whole truth. According to them, there were only four keys to the apartment, which worked on both the doors that opened on to the landing. Josépha had one, Jave had another, the concierge a third, and Madame Jave's key had been given to Doctor Négrel for the duration of his tenure.

So unless the concierge had lied, and it is difficult to see why she would, someone had opened the door to Éveline.

Josépha maintained that it wasn't her.

Négrel swore that he hadn't seen the young woman.

Négrel, it was true, already had two lies to his name, but both could be attributed to a certain masculine discretion.

Firstly, he had denied having relations with Madame Jave.

Secondly, he had claimed that the latter had never visited him at his lodgings in Rue des Saints-Pères.

'Wish he'd sort it out!' Maigret suddenly mumbled as he signalled to the waiter to bring him another beer.

'Do you mean Janvier?'

It was indeed Janvier that he was thinking of. It irritated him that he was in the dark, and to think that at headquarters they had information in hand that would allow him to see things more clearly.

'Do you think he isn't doing a good job?'

'On the contrary, he is doing an excellent job. It's not his fault that Coméliau insisted on arresting Négrel at any cost.'

'Is he innocent?'

'I don't know. But in any case it is a mistake to arrest him without having more information. Especially since Noël Chapuis will now make sure to muddy the waters. He didn't go to Concarneau for no reason.'

‘What is he hoping for?’

‘He wants to prove that Jave had every reason to want to get rid of his wife.’

‘And did he?’

‘Yes. But his client did too.’

‘Are you sure you’d rather not go into your office?’

‘Quite sure. Especially since Janvier is using it. It’s a good thing he smokes only cigarettes, or he might be tempted to use my pipes.’

Having got that off his chest, he poked gentle fun at himself:

‘Don’t worry. I’m not jealous of good old Janvier. It’s just a little pang, that’s all. Let’s go …!’

‘Where?’

‘Anywhere. We can walk along the river if you like, towards Bercy.’

And Madame Maigret, thinking about her feet and the length of the walk, suppressed a sigh.

7. The Little Bar on Quai de Charenton

Maigret had finally sat down on a bench and stayed there for a whole half-hour without feeling the need to get up. His wife, sitting next to him, couldn't believe how peaceful he looked and kept glancing at him in surprise, as if she expected him to snap out of it at any moment and announce:

'Let's go!'

They were on Quai de Bercy, where the shade of the trees was as soft and restful that afternoon as in an avenue in a small town. The bench, God knows why, was facing away from the Seine, so the view before the Maigrets was of a strange town carefully guarded and surrounded by railings, where the houses were not proper houses but rather wine depots, and the names on the signs were the names they were used to seeing on wine bottles and, in larger letters, on the gable-ends of farmhouses along the road.

There were streets, as in a real town, crossroads, squares and avenues, but instead of cars they were full of casks of all sizes.

'Do you know what we in the police force call a drunk who we pick up off the street?'

'You've told me, but I've forgotten.'

'A Bercy. For example, if you ask a cycling constable if he's had a quiet night or if anything has happened on his beat, he'll say: "Not a lot. Three Bercys." '

He suddenly looked at his wife with a faint smile.

'Do you think I'm silly?'

She pretended she hadn't understood. But he was sure that she

knew what he meant. She put on her most naive look and asked him:

'Why?'

'I'm on holiday. Pardon let me stay in Paris on the firm understanding that I would not concern myself with anything but simply enjoy myself. For once, people can go around killing one another and it is none of my business.'

'But you're champing at the bit over this affair.' She completed his sentence for him.

'I'm not champing at the bit. I'll even admit something to you: there are moments when I really enjoy playing amateur detective. You've seen soldiers firing little airguns in shooting galleries at fairs? Sometimes, maybe even that same day, they've complained about having to do shooting practice at the range with real rifles. Do you see what I'm getting at?'

He rarely opened up in this way, which showed just how relaxed he was.

'At the start this story intrigued me. It still interests me. Unfortunately, I reach a point where I can't resist putting myself in other people's shoes.'

She was obviously thinking about Jave and Négrel when she asked:

'Whose shoes?'

Laughing, he replied:

'Perhaps those of the victim. Let's leave Janvier to get on with it and not think any more about it.'

He kept his word for a while at least. When he got up, it wasn't to take Madame Maigret home to Boulevard Richard-Lenoir, but rather he headed towards Quai de Charenton, where Paris suddenly starts to look suburban. He had always loved these wide unloading quaysides piled up with barrels and goods of all sorts and the grey-coloured houses between the new buildings that evoked a Paris of yesteryear.

'I wonder why we never thought of finding an apartment next to the river.'

From his window he would have seen the barges nestling cheek by jowl, the bargemen's wives, the children with hemp-coloured hair, the washing drying on lines.

'Do you see that house they are knocking down? A young man lived there who came to see me one day in my office with his

mother and pinched one of my pipes.'

There were few places in Paris that didn't evoke some more or less difficult or notorious case he had conducted. Madame Maigret knew about them from hearsay. She asked:

'Is this the place where you spent three days and three nights, in some restaurant or other, when they found an unknown man murdered on Place de la Concorde?'

'It's a bit further along. The restaurant has been converted into a garage. There, where you can see those two petrol pumps.'

On another occasion, he had walked the full length of the quayside, from the lock at Charenton as far as Ile Saint-Louis, on the heels of a tug-boat owner whom he eventually sent to prison.

'Are you thirsty?'

Madame Maigret was never thirsty, but she was always willing to follow him.

'In that bar too, the one on the corner, I spent hours watching someone.'

They went in. There was no terrace and no one inside, apart from a thin blonde woman who was listening to the radio as she sat sewing behind the counter.

He ordered an aperitif for himself and a fruit juice for his wife and sat down at a table while the landlady observed them with a frown.

She wasn't sure if she recognized him. It had been more than three years since he had last set foot in the bar. On the yellow-painted walls there were some posters like the ones you see in country cafés and inns, and a smell of stew emanated from the kitchen. To complete the picture a marmalade cat was purring on a straw-bottomed chair.

'Still or sparkling?'

'Sparkling.'

She looked intrigued, as if trying to put a name to a face. When she had served their drinks she leaned over a newspaper on the bar, had an afterthought, picked up the paper and walked over to Maigret, a little embarrassed.

'Is this you?' she asked.

She used her finger to underline a heading saying 'Stop press'. It was the same paper that Maigret had in his pocket, but it was a later edition.

It was his turn to frown as his wife leaned over his shoulder to read at the same time as him.

> We asked our correspondent at Les Sables-d'Olonne to go to the Hôtel des Roches Noires, where Detective Chief Inspector Maigret is supposed to be on holiday. We wanted to share with our readers the opinion of the famous inspector on one of the most troubling affairs of the last few years.
>
> The owner of the Roches Noires seemed a bit embarrassed.
>
> 'The inspector has gone out,' was his initial response.
>
> 'What time will he be back?'
>
> 'He may not be back today.'
>
> 'Is his wife in the hotel?'
>
> 'She went out too.'
>
> 'When?'
>
> In short, after much beating about the bush, the owner eventually admitted that Maigret had not been in the hotel for at least the last twenty-four hours.
>
> Our correspondent was unable, despite his best efforts, to get any further information.
>
> Has Inspector Janvier, who has never before been in charge of such a delicate case, called his chief for help, and has Maigret dashed back to Paris?
>
> We telephoned him straight away. We managed to get him on the other end of the line. He confirmed to us that he has not been in contact with the detective chief inspector at any point and, as far as he was aware, the latter was still in the Vendée.
>
> We also attempted to ring Maigret's apartment in Boulevard Richard-Lenoir, but we were answered by the telephone message service.
>
> This is just one minor mystery to add to the much more terrible one of the dead woman in Boulevard Haussmann.

The landlady in the bar was looking at him quizzically.

'It's you, isn't it? You've been here before, two or three years ago. It was definitely you, I remember you were with a short fat man with a skip in his step.'

She was talking about Lucas.

'It's me, yes,' he owned up, unable to deny it. 'We have come back to Paris for a few hours, my wife and I, but we are still on holiday.'

'You should never believe what you read in the papers,' she concluded as she went back to resume her position behind the counter.

There was another piece of information in the newspaper.

Early this afternoon, Examining Magistrate Coméliau summoned Doctor Négrel to his chambers for questioning. The young doctor steadfastly refused to answer questions without his lawyer present. But Maître Chapuis, who is both his future father-in-law and his lawyer, is still in Concarneau, where he is creating quite a stir among the local populace. According to latest reports, he is satisfied by the results of his trip to the Breton port and will be returning by train to Paris this evening.

Has he been in phone contact with his daughter? Or did she act on her own initiative? Either way, she turned up at the Police Judiciaire, without being summoned, and asked to speak to Inspector Janvier.

The inspector is more forthcoming now than at the start of the affair and made no secret of the reason for the young woman's visit.

She wanted to declare that she was aware of the relationship that had existed between Négrel and Éveline Jave and that she attached no great importance to it.

'Gilbert,' she said vehemently, 'took pity on her. She literally threw herself into his arms two years ago. He didn't love her. He saw her as little as possible. He's been very open about the fact that, since we've known each other, he has seen her again three or four times and that she has pursued him back to his place. I'm sure that Jave, who knew what his wife was like, was quite aware of it and wasn't jealous.'

Since the young woman left Quai des Orfèvres has been a hive of activity, and further developments are expected imminently. At the time of writing, two inspectors, Lapointe and Neveu, have just left the building, destination unknown.

In Maigret's office, currently occupied by Inspector Janvier, the phone has been ringing constantly.

That put an end to the relaxed mood. A few minutes earlier, Maigret had been walking peacefully along the river with his wife, telling her tales of old investigations. Now his face had darkened again, and he seemed to be staring at the yellow walls covered with posters without seeing them.

'Do you think,' his wife asked, 'they will be keeping an eye on Boulevard Richard-Lenoir?'

He wasn't thinking about that at that precise moment and he gave a start; it took a few seconds for the words he had just heard as if through a fog to sink in.

'Possibly. Yes. It's quite likely.'

Lassagne, who was still in Concarneau, must be in constant contact with his newspaper and he would surely send some young reporter to stand guard in front of Maigret's apartment.

'Same again, please, madame.'

'Have you read it?'

‘Yes. Thank you.’

He wasn’t in that little bar any more. His wife was as familiar with that look as his colleagues. At Quai des Orfèvres, when he was in this mood, everyone walked on eggshells and talked in whispers, because he could suddenly fly off into a temper as violent as it was short-lived, and that afterwards he would be the first to regret.

Madame Maigret thought it wisest not to look at him and instead pretended to peruse the women’s pages of the newspaper while remaining on alert for her husband’s reactions.

Maigret himself probably couldn’t have put a finger on what he was thinking. Perhaps because he wasn’t thinking at all? It wasn’t a process of reasoning. It was a bit as if the three characters in the drama had started inhabiting him, and the supporting cast, such as Josépha, Antoinette, the little fiancée, Mademoiselle Jusserand, were no longer mere entities but flesh-and-blood human beings.

Unfortunately, they were still incomplete, sketchy beings. Maigret was having great difficulty in making them emerge from the half-light in which they resided. He could sense that the truth was almost within reach, but he was powerless to grasp it.

Two men, one guilty, the other innocent. Occasionally his lips moved, as if he were trying to pronounce a name, but after a hesitation, he would give up on it.

There wasn’t, as in the majority of cases, a single possible solution. There were at least two.

However, only one was the good one, only one was the human truth. It wasn’t a matter of discovering it through careful reasoning, through a logical reconstruction of the facts, but of feeling it.

On Friday Éveline had telephoned Négrel, who was more or less resigned to being her lover.

Did she tell him that she would be catching the plane to Paris the next morning?

Or was it rather the young doctor’s coldness towards her that had inspired her to make this trip?

Barely had she left on Saturday morning when Jave rushed to the airport and, missing the flight to Paris, got on a plane to London so as not to have to wait any longer.

‘Do you believe that?’ he suddenly asked, talking to himself rather than to Madame Maigret.

‘What?’

‘A coincidence. Éveline Jave is in love with Négrel and, after a

few weeks apart from him, can't stand it any more and rushes back to Paris. Her husband is in love with Antoinette Chauvet and, the same day, feels an urgent need to fly home and take her in his arms.'

Madame Maigret thought about this.

'Wasn't he simply taking advantage of his wife's absence?'

Maigret's instincts told him no. He didn't much care for chance events.

'In Paris, without his car, he had to take at least two taxis, one to get from Boulevard des Capucines, where the airport bus dropped him, to Rue Washington, and another to go to the station in the evening. If I know Janvier, he will have questioned all the taxi-drivers.'

'Do you think that will lead to something?'

'It has led to results in the past, but it takes a lot of time.'

After a fairly long pause, during which he drank another mouthful and lit a new pipe, he sighed:

'She was naked ...'

That image of Éveline, naked, bent double in the cupboard, was constantly playing on his mind.

To his surprise, his wife overcame her natural modesty, which he often teased her about.

'Given what she had been up to in Boulevard Haussmann, it was normal enough, wasn't it?'

He wanted to reply:

'No.'

It didn't hang together. Was it because of Négrel's character that this version of events didn't ring true? The young doctor was standing in for a colleague in one of the most luxurious surgeries in Paris. He had a certain number of appointments with patients – five were mentioned. Others could turn up at any moment, since it was in surgery hours, and Josépha was just across the landing.

Even if Éveline had undressed in the bedroom, even if he had killed her, deliberately or not, wasn't Négrel just the sort of man who would have put her clothes back on?

Not necessarily to allay suspicion, more as a sort of reflex.

The radio was on in the background, but Maigret wasn't listening to it. He sat there with his eyes half closed and continued to replay the events of Saturday afternoon.

Josépha, by her own account, had left Boulevard Haussmann

around six o'clock to go to her daughter's apartment, where she met Doctor Jave.

At her first interrogation she had lied, claiming that she hadn't seen her employer since he had left for Cannes. That could be put down to a desire not to compromise her daughter. But there were other possible explanations.

He thought that he was just beginning to see a faint glimmer through the mist, but it was still too vague for him to get hold of. He thought about the landing, with the two doors leading off it ... What did that landing ...?

At that moment, Madame Maigret laid her hand on his wrist.

'Listen!'

He hadn't noticed that the radio had stopped playing music and that there was someone talking:

'Latest news this afternoon. It appears that the Boulevard Haussmann affair is entering its closing phase ...'

The voice was monotonous. The speaker must be reading from a note that had just been put under his nose and he stumbled over certain words:

'At three o'clock this afternoon two inspectors from the Police Judiciaire turned up at the residence of Doctor Jave in Boulevard Haussmann and emerged a few minutes later accompanied by the doctor.

'The latter seemed to have lost weight over the last four days and he walked across the pavement without a sideways glance at the journalists who were trying to extract a quote from him.

'At more or less the same time another inspector was bringing another person in a taxi to Quai des Orfèvres, a person who has remained a bit of a mystery up until now, since she has been impossible to get hold of in the last few days: we are referring to Mademoiselle Antoinette Chauvet, the doctor's mistress.

'Holding her head higher than Jave, she crossed the courtyard of the Police Judiciaire behind the inspector, mounted the steps of the large staircase and was ushered in to see Inspector Janvier immediately.

'Jave was to arrive a few minutes later. The same door opened to let him in and shut behind him.

'The questioning of the doctor and Antoinette Chauvet has been going on for two hours now with no sign of it ending any time soon. On the contrary, the atmosphere in the corridors and offices, where

police officers are bustling in and out, suggests that Inspector Janvier is intent on bringing this to a conclusion.

'Only one new detail has come to our attention: in the bedroom behind the consulting room at Boulevard Haussmann the police discovered a button that seems to have been torn off Gilbert Négrel's jacket.

'And now for the political news of the last twelve hours, and ...'

The bar owner turned the radio off.

'Am I right in thinking you're not interested in this?'

Maigret looked at her as if he hadn't heard a word she had said. He had just felt his chest tighten, because the words spoken by the radio announcer had a quite different resonance for him than for the general audience.

Just as they say a soldier can smell the gunshot, he could sense something coming to a head in his own office. That feverish activity that the radio mentioned was very familiar to him, as he had initiated it himself on hundreds of occasions.

An investigation treads water, or seems to tread water, for days, sometimes weeks. Then suddenly, when you least expect it, something slots into place, maybe as the result of an anonymous telephone call or the discovery of some apparently insignificant detail.

'Bring Jave in ...'

He could imagine Janvier, looking a little pale, like an actor seized by stage fright just before making his entrance, pacing up and down in his office as he awaited Antoinette and the doctor.

Why had they been brought in together? What new questions were they going to be asked?

When he had left on holiday Maigret hadn't taken all his pipes with him. There must still be four or five lying next to his blotting pad by the lamp with the green shade. There was even a half-bottle of cognac in the cupboard where he usually washed his hands in the enamel sink and where he hung one of his old jackets.

How would Janvier perform? He was twenty years younger than Maigret but he had attended most of the latter's investigations and knew his methods better than anyone.

Did he have broad enough shoulders for the role he was taking on? Or what in the movies they call 'presence'? Jave was older than him, a man of some importance, who had seen a lot and experienced a lot.

‘Are we going?’ asked Madame Maigret when he stood up and went to the counter to pay for the drinks.

‘Yes.’

This time he didn’t force her to walk. He stood at the edge of the kerb to hail a taxi, and eventually one pulled up.

‘The corner of Boulevard Richard-Lenoir and Boulevard Voltaire.’

And once he had settled into the back seat:

‘In case there are journalists watching outside our building.’

‘You mean I should go in on my own?’

He batted his eyelids in the affirmative, and she didn’t ask any more questions.

‘Go in as if there is nothing out of the ordinary. If the reporters question you, say that we have come back to spend a few hours in Paris and that I am in town. Prepare dinner, and if I don’t get back by eight o’clock, eat without me.’

Just as when he was at work at Quai des Orfèvres or out on a case. Not only did he not always make it back for dinner, sometimes she wouldn’t see him until the early hours.

‘I’m in the office,’ he would tell her on the phone. ‘I don’t know when I’ll be finished.’

She too had heard the radio. She could guess what was going on over there. She wondered whether her husband was going to renege on the promise he had made to her – and to Pardon – that he wouldn’t set foot in police headquarters during his holiday.

She knew he wanted to. She could see he was fretful, moody. When the taxi drew to a halt she murmured:

‘You could just go in.’

He shook his head. He waited until she had gone before saying to the driver:

‘Boulevard Saint-Michel. In front of the fountain.’

Maybe it was childish, but he felt the need to get closer to the field of battle. Sometimes curious onlookers stand for hours outside a house where a crime has been committed, even though there is nothing to look at.

All that he could see was the imposing entrance to the Police Judiciaire, with a police officer on guard outside, the courtyard with some small black cars parked there and the windows, one of which was the one to his office.

Two photographers stood waiting with their equipment out on the quayside, and there must have been others, as well as reporters,

in the vast corridor on the first floor.

Had Janvier really uncovered some new piece of information? Was he acting on his own initiative or under the instruction of the irascible Coméliau?

Gilbert Négrel was on his own in one of the cells looking out on to the second interior courtyard.

There was no more talk of Éveline's funeral, as if everyone, including her brother, had all of a sudden lost interest.

Maigret reached Quai des Grands-Augustins, just opposite the Palais de Justice, hesitated a moment, then went into a small Norman bar, slightly below street level, so he had to descend two steps to go in. It was always cool in there, no matter how hot it was outside, and there was no bistro in Paris where the smell of calvados was as strong.

'So, what the newspaper says is true ...'

The landlord with the blotchy face had known him for years. He had the latest edition of the newspaper open in front of him.

'What can I get you? Not too late for a little calva?'

He took it upon himself to fill two glasses. There was only one other customer, who was sitting in the corner perusing a travel brochure, and the waitress was laying the six tables with their red-checked tablecloths.

'What was the weather like at Les Sables? Here, apart from a storm, it's been glorious. Your good health!'

Maigret clicked glasses and drank a mouthful.

'From the start I thought they'd call you back. I even said to my wife:

' "A case like this, only Inspector Maigret can solve it."

'Because, if you want my advice, I reckon they're all lying. Don't you agree?

'If I was in Inspector Janvier's shoes – it's been a while since he's dropped in here for a drink, by the way – if I was in his shoes, as I was saying, I'd have put them face to face, doctors or no doctors, and said to them:

' "You two sort it out between you." '

Maigret couldn't help smiling, but he never took his eyes off the open windows of his office, which he could view from inside the bar. At one point he saw a man in profile, walking back and forth, and he recognized Janvier's silhouette. He could even, in spite of the distance, make out a cloud of cigarette smoke in the silhouette.

The detail of the button was niggling at Maigret. It struck a false note for him. It obviously suggested that there had been some sort of struggle between Éveline and Doctor Négrel. From there it was but a short step to concluding that it was he who had struck the young woman or thrown her against a piece of furniture.

That in turn would explain the injection of digitalin, and even the mistake over the drug.

'She was naked ...' he murmured without realizing.

'Pardon?'

'Nothing. I was wondering ...'

He could see that glimmer again that he had first glimpsed on Quai de Charenton. Something didn't quite fit here. One of the secondary characters kept popping into his mind, someone who had been talked about the least.

That was Claire Jusserand, the nurse whom Doctor Jave had poached from a Parisian clinic to take care of his child.

According to the papers, she had first of all refused to speak and locked herself away in the Villa Marie-Thérèse, where she could only be spotted at a distance, in the garden with little Michèle.

He remembered an anodyne phrase that he had read somewhere, in an article by Lassagne or one of the others.

Mademoiselle Jusserand is around fifty and seems to hate all men ...

He knew the sort. Most of them, in fact, do not hate just men, but women too, and live closed in on themselves.

But they don't necessarily hate *all* men. Sometimes they harbour a secret devotion to one individual, and this becomes their sole reason for living.

Had she known Jave for a long time? In view of her profession, that was possible, indeed quite likely, as the doctor had patients in most of the clinics in Paris.

Maigret tried to imagine her at Boulevard Haussmann and inside the Villa Marie-Thérèse. She hadn't known love, or, if she had, it had been an unhappy love.

How had she got on with Éveline, whom she saw amassing jewels and who had not only a husband but also a lover?

The sun was setting, and the last of the tug-boats with their flotillas of barges were hastening to some port or other along the Seine. A fisherman was taking his rod apart, and the booksellers' stalls were already shut.

‘I don’t suppose you’ll be dining here? I guess you are too busy?’

‘I have nothing to do. I’m on holiday.’

There was a hint of bitterness in his voice as he said that.

‘What’s on today’s menu?’

The menu was chalked on to a slate. There was Normandy sole and roast veal.

‘I’ll dine here.’

The landlord had a knowing look on his face. He didn’t believe a word of what Maigret had said about being on holiday. For him as for so many others, whatever was printed in the newspapers was gospel.

‘Maria! Reserve the table next to the window for the inspector.’

And he gave Maigret a wink, convinced that he was only here in order to keep an eye on heaven knows what.

‘Top up the glasses ... This one’s on me ...’

Jave and Antoinette had been in Maigret’s office for nearly four hours, faced by an increasingly nervous Janvier.

The lamp with the green shade was switched on. Someone came to close the window. Half an hour later, when Maigret was eating his dinner, he spotted the waiter from the Brasserie Dauphine going up with a tray covered by a napkin.

That was a sign. Glasses of beer and sandwiches signified that the interrogation was going to go on late into the evening.

There was little expectation of a result any time soon, and three or four reporters left the building and headed for the restaurant on Place Dauphine. They wouldn’t have gone so far if they hadn’t been sure that they had enough time to eat a meal.

There were now five other customers in the restaurant: two men, sitting together on a banquette and chatting about carburettors – no doubt travelling salesmen – a foreign couple who were having trouble making themselves understood and finally a young blonde woman who had looked at Maigret with a frown as she came in through the door.

He hadn’t recognized her at first, even though the newspapers had published her photo. It was Martine Chapuis. She was wearing a printed cotton dress and was chubbier and fleshier than she had appeared in her pictures.

She also chose a place near the window and never took her eyes off police headquarters, except when she cast a glance at the inspector.

He found her very appealing from the start. She had an open face, a well-defined mouth, and was more feminine than you would have expected of someone so deeply immersed in university studies.

He almost wanted to go to speak to her, and she had the same idea herself on more than one occasion, as, whenever their eyes met, a faint smile appeared on her lips.

She knew from the papers and the radio what was happening across the road. She was quite familiar with the workings of the police from her father and she too was waiting for the grand finale.

She wanted to be in the front row. Wasn't she one of those with a particular vested interest?

'A real woman,' he thought as he was served with the cheese course.

Suddenly he got to his feet and went into the kitchen, where the landlord, who had put on his white chef's hat, was at work at the stove.

'May I make a telephone call to Cannes?'

'You know where the booth is. You just have to ask the price.'

Martine Chapuis, who was following him with her eyes, saw him go through the glass door and pick up the receiver.

'Villa Marie-Thérèse in Cannes, please, mademoiselle. It's a personal call for Mademoiselle Jusserand.'

'There'll be a few minutes' delay.'

He went back to his table and had barely finished his camembert when the phone rang.

It was his turn to have stage fright, as he was about to do something he hadn't attempted before, something he wouldn't have been allowed to do had he been where Janvier was, in his office.

The line was, as he had both expected and hoped, a bad one. He heard a voice at the other end of it repeating impatiently:

'Hello ... Hello ... This is the Villa Marie-Thérèse ... Who's calling?'

The papers had written that the cook was a local woman. But the person who was speaking had no accent, which suggested that it was Mademoiselle Jusserand who was talking. He disguised his voice the best he could.

'Hello! Claire?'

He was taking a risk – he had no idea how Jave addressed the nurse.

'That's me, yes. Who is this?'

He had to take another risk.

'It's monsieur.'

'It's a bad line,' she said. 'I can hardly hear you. The little one is crying in the room next door.'

It was working. He had used the right words. Now he just had to ask the question:

'Tell me, Claire, when the police questioned you about the phone call madame made on Friday, did you tell them that you had talked to me about it?'

He waited, his heart pounding. Through the glass he could see Martine Chapuis staring at him.

'Of course not,' said the voice at the other end of the line.

The nurse sounded somewhat shocked, as if she felt that she wasn't trusted.

'Thank you. That's all.'

He quickly hung up, forgetting to ask the operator how much it had cost, remembering only when he was back at his table.

Sitting opposite him on the other side of the narrow room, the young woman was giving him a worried look, and it was all he could do not to smile at her.

8. Inspector Janvier's Big Night

The two travelling salesmen were the first to leave. As the landlord had said to Maigret towards the end of his meal, his regular customers were all in the country or at the seaside, and when it came to tourists 'you never know'. One day the place was packed, for no good reason, 'because they follow each other like sheep'. Another day, like today, there would be only 'a couple of oddballs' who sent back the dishes they didn't like and then disputed the bill franc by franc.

Martine Chapuis had finished her coffee before Maigret and had opened her handbag to touch up her lipstick. She had then looked to the back of the room, where the landlord was, as well as the waitress, as if to ask for the bill.

Maigret, who was sitting back in his banquette, puffing on his pipe, observed her and wondered whether she would dare ... He sometimes amused himself by trying to predict what people would do next, and he always felt a certain satisfaction when he called it right.

Would she raise her hand to summon the waitress? She started to, but then glanced across at Maigret. Good! She was changing her mind and was looking at him a little more intently, opening her eyes wider as if to ask a question.

In response, he batted his eyelids in an almost fatherly fashion.

They understood each other. Somewhat awkwardly, she stood up and came over to his table. He stood up to offer her a seat.

It was he who called the waitress, but not for the bill.

‘Two calvados, my dear. From the landlord’s bottle.’

And to a surprised Martine he said:

‘You must be needing one. It’s a long wait, isn’t it?’

‘What I don’t understand is why you aren’t across the road. I read the paper and listened to the radio.’

‘I really am on holiday.’

‘In Paris?’

‘Shush! It’s a secret. We decided, my wife and I, to spend our holiday in Paris in order to have some peace and quiet, and even Janvier doesn’t know about it. So, as you see, I am in hiding.’

‘But you’re still involved in the case somehow?’

‘As an amateur, like everyone else. I too have been reading the papers and just now, by chance, I heard the news on the radio.’

‘Do you think Inspector Janvier is capable of understanding?’

‘Understanding what?’

‘That Gilbert didn’t kill that woman.’

The restaurant was currently as calm as an aquarium. The landlord and his wife, a little round woman with a face as red as her husband’s, were eating at the table nearest the kitchen, and the waitress was serving them.

On the opposite bank of the river, they saw some journalists come back. They must have washed down their rushed dinner with liberal quantities of drink, because they were clearly in high spirits.

Nearly all the lights had been turned off in police headquarters. On the first floor only Maigret’s office and the adjoining inspectors’ room were still illuminated.

Maigret was taking his time and had recovered his good humour.

‘You’re sure of that, are you? That he’s innocent?’

She blushed, which pleased Maigret, as he didn’t like women who were no longer capable of blushing.

‘Of course.’

‘Because you love him?’

‘Because I know he would be incapable of committing any shameful act, let alone a crime.’

‘Have you thought so from the beginning?’

She turned her head away, and he persisted:

‘Admit that you had doubts.’

‘I told myself at first that it could have been an accident.’

‘And now?’

‘I’m convinced that it wasn’t him.’

‘Why?’

Since the start of his meal he had had the feeling that she wanted to talk to him, that she really had something to say to him, something quite difficult. From the way that she behaved with him, he thought he understood how close she was to her father, how she confided in him. It was as if, in her father’s absence, she had chosen the inspector to stand in for him.

Instead of replying, she asked a question of her own:

‘Was it Concarneau you were ringing just now?’

‘No.’

‘Ah!’

She seemed disappointed that she had got it wrong.

‘I wonder what they’ve been up to over there all this time.’

‘Best not be impatient. It could go on all night.’

‘Do you think they are questioning Gilbert too?’

‘Possibly, but I don’t think so. Négrel is now in the custody of the examining magistrate and can’t be questioned without his lawyer present.’

‘Papa doesn’t get back until tomorrow morning.’

‘I know. You still haven’t told me why you are so certain that it wasn’t your fiancé who killed Madame Jave.’

She lit a cigarette, somewhat nervously.

‘May I?’

‘Feel free.’

‘It’s difficult to explain. You’ve never seen Gilbert, have you?’

‘No. However, I think I have formed a very good idea of what he is like.’

‘And of how he behaves when he is with a woman?’

He looked at her, surprised and intrigued.

‘I don’t need to be coy with you, do I? From what I’ve said you’ve probably realized that we didn’t wait until we got married to be with one another. Mother is furious, because people gossip, but Papa doesn’t mind. When that woman’s body was found, it was completely naked ...’

Maigret narrowed his eyes, peered at her more intently, because she was touching on a point that had intrigued him from the start.

‘I don’t know how to put this ... It’s a little delicate ... With some men it might have been possible ... Do you follow?’

‘Not yet.’

She downed half of her drink to screw up her courage.

‘If there had been something going on between them that Saturday and if Madame Jave had got undressed, Gilbert would have undressed too.’

It suddenly occurred to him that that was right. Other men would have been capable of acting differently, more casually. Not a young man like Négrel, who would have insisted in some way on being on equal terms with his companion.

‘How do we know he didn’t?’

It was barely a question at all, because he already knew the answer.

‘You’re forgetting that this was in surgery hours, and that Josépha could show in a patient at any moment. Can you imagine a doctor turning up naked in his surgery?’

She even managed to laugh at this. But she soon turned serious again and cast a glance to the other side of the Seine.

‘I swear, inspector, that I’m telling you the truth. I know Gilbert. Strange as it may seem, he is shy and very sensitive in the way he deals with women.’

‘I believe you.’

‘So do you also believe that he didn’t kill her?’

He chose not to answer but cast a glance in turn at the windows of his office, where Inspector Janvier was having what could be described without hyperbole as the biggest night of his life. The reporters and photographers were waiting in the corridor. The newspapers and the radio had announced that the decisive interrogation was underway.

Either the Boulevard Haussmann affair would be resolved in the next few hours and Janvier would have won the day or else when morning came the public would feel disappointed and cheated. And not just the general public. Coméliau would be ringing every half-hour from home, in order to keep up with developments.

‘Would you excuse me a moment, my dear?’

He surprised himself calling her that, but it was because he really liked her. If he had had a daughter it wouldn’t have upset him if she had turned out like her. Madame Maigret would have reacted like Martine’s mother, but he would surely have been more like Chapuis.

He headed to the back of the room.

‘Do you have any plain paper and an envelope?’

‘Plain is the only sort of paper we have. Use the blotter behind

the counter. There is also a bottle of ink and a pen.'

'The boy I spotted earlier washing up in the kitchen, how long has he been working for you?'

'His mother brought him to us three weeks ago. He goes back to school in October. They are poor folk, and he tries to earn a bit of money for them during the holidays.'

'Has Janvier been here in the last three weeks?'

'I haven't seen him, no. When they want a drink they usually go to the Brasserie Dauphine, because it's closer.'

Maigret knew that better than most.

'Don't let the boy go. I want him to run an errand for me.'

'He's busy enough for now tidying up the kitchen.'

Maigret didn't return to his place but sat down at another table some distance away from Martine Chapuis. On the envelope he wrote:

> FOR THE ATTENTION OF INSPECTOR JANVIER
> VERY URGENT

From her seat the young woman could see him writing out block capitals and didn't understand what was going on.

The message on the sheet was short and sweet:

> JAVE FOUND OUT FROM THE NURSE ON FRIDAY EVENING THAT HIS WIFE WOULD BE COMING TO PARIS

He went into the kitchen.

'What's your name?' he asked the boy with the dishevelled mop of hair who was stacking the dishes.

'Ernest, inspector.'

'Who told you who I was?'

'No one. I recognized you from your photos.'

'Would you like to do me a favour? You're not easily intimidated, are you?'

'By you, maybe, but not anyone else.'

'I want you to run over to the Police Judiciaire over there. Do you know it?'

'That large entrance where there is always a policeman on guard?'

'Yes. Give this envelope to the policeman and tell him to take it straight away to Inspector Janvier.'

'Got it.'

'Just a minute. I haven't finished. It is possible the policeman will

ask you to take it up yourself.'

'Should I do that?'

'Yes. To the first floor. There will be lots of people about. You'll see an old clerk behind a desk with a chain around his neck.'

'I know what you mean. They have them in banks.'

'Tell him the same thing. If an inspector happens to be nearby, he may ask you some questions. So remember this: you were walking over Pont Saint-Michel when a gentleman gave you five francs to take a letter to the Police Judiciaire.'

'Understood.'

'And the gentleman was short and thin ...'

The boy was amused and was eager to be off.

'Short and thin and quite old ...'

'Yes, Monsieur Maigret.'

'That's all. It would be best if you didn't come back here afterwards, as they might follow you.'

'Are you playing a joke on them?'

Maigret simply responded with a smile and went back to sit down opposite the young woman.

'Let's see what happens.'

'What have you done?'

'I've been behaving just like an average reader, the sort who sends messages signed "Someone who knows".'

She saw Ernest set off with the letter after a quick word with the landlord and followed him with her eyes as far as Pont Saint-Michel, where he broke into a trot.

'Is this because of what I told you?'

'No.'

'Because of your telephone call?'

'Yes.'

The landlord and his wife had finished their meal. Their table had been cleared.

'Do you think they're waiting for us to leave so they can close up?'

'I do.'

'They probably have to get up early in the morning.'

'The problem is, if we leave we have nowhere to go.'

There wasn't any other café or bar open that had a view of the Police Judiciaire. The boy was talking to the policeman on guard on the other bank. A moment later he was disappearing inside the

entrance.

'I thought they'd send him up. The policeman isn't allowed to leave his post. Unless ...'

It must have all gone well. Ernest reappeared three or four minutes later and this time headed off in the direction of Pont-Neuf.

Janvier had received the anonymous letter. Even if he didn't set great store by it, he wouldn't fail to at least put one question to Doctor Jave on the subject.

'You don't seem impatient,' Martine remarked as he slumped in his seat, staring into the middle distance.

That was because she didn't know him. It was the first time that he had experienced this phase of an investigation anywhere other than in his office and he had the same feeling as when he was asking the questions himself.

He had conducted hundreds of interrogations with all manner of different people. Most of them lasted several hours. Some of them went on, in a cloud of pipe or cigarette smoke, late into the night, and the inspectors sometimes had to work in shifts.

At headquarters they still talked about an interrogation that had lasted twenty-seven hours. Maigret was almost as exhausted as the man who had eventually confessed.

Yet, after all these years, the same thing happened every time.

While the suspect in front of him was still holding out, refusing to talk or lying, it was so to speak a battle of equals, on an almost technical level. He would ask one question after another, making them as unpredictable as possible, and watch out for the faintest flicker on the part of his interlocutor.

Almost always, sooner or later, the moment came when his resistance would suddenly crack, and Maigret would have him on the ropes. Because at that moment he became a man again, a man who had stolen, murdered, but a man nonetheless, a man who was going to pay the price and knew it, a man for whom this moment marked a definitive break with his past, his friends and family.

Like an animal about to be put down – yet Maigret had never been able to kill any living creature, even a harmful one – he would nearly always stare at the man who had driven him to a confession with a look of astonishment mingled with reproach.

'That's exactly what happened ...' he would murmur, all his energy spent.

All he felt now was an impatience to sign his statement, sign

anything, and go to sleep.

And how many times had Maigret then taken his bottle of cognac out of the cupboard, not just to offer his victim a drink, but to pour a large glass for himself?

He had done his duty as a policeman. He didn't judge. It wasn't for him to judge – that was for others to do later, and he preferred it that way.

Where were they at now, up there behind the lit-up windows of Maigret's office? Had Jave's resistance started to crumble, and was Janvier moving in for the kill?

It was as if the young woman sitting opposite was reading his thoughts.

'It's strange,' she murmured. 'I'd never have believed that Doctor Jave would be capable of that either. He just doesn't have the look of a murderer.'

Maigret said nothing. What was the point of explaining that, throughout his career, apart from a handful of professional criminals, he had never encountered any murderer who had the look of one?

'What do I owe you, patron?'

'Paying for both dinners?'

'I insist on paying for my own,' Martine Chapuis protested.

He didn't press it.

'The calvados are on me.'

'If you like.'

They left together and had barely reached Pont Saint-Michel when the landlord pulled the shutters down behind them.

'Are you going over?'

'No. I'll wait.'

Fortunately Quai des Orfèvres was not well lit. If they stayed on the pavement nearest the Seine they were in shadow, and the officer on duty would not be able to recognize them.

'Do you think he'll confess?'

Maigret simply shrugged his shoulders. He wasn't God the Father. He had done all he could. Now it was up to Janvier.

They walked in silence. From a distance they might have been taken for two lovers, or rather a couple out to take the air along the river before heading for bed.

'I'm almost sorry,' Maigret suddenly muttered, 'that it wasn't Négrel.'

She gave a start and shot him a hard look.

'What do you mean by that?'

'Don't be upset. I've got nothing against Gilbert. Quite the opposite. But if it had been him it could have been an accident. Do you follow?'

'I think I'm beginning to understand.'

'Firstly, your fiancé didn't have a good enough reason to kill her. Especially since you were quite aware of his relationship with Éveline Jave. Because you were aware, weren't you?'

'Yes.'

He stopped walking and asked her without looking at her:

'Why are you lying?'

'I'm not lying. That is ...'

'Go on.'

'I knew because he had confessed to me that he had been seeing her. She had almost forced him into it. I also knew that she was still pursuing him ...'

'But not that she was coming from Cannes to see him?'

'No.'

'Nor that she had been at his place during the time that you had known him?'

'No. You can see I'm being straight with you. He didn't talk about it out of sensitivity. It doesn't change anything, does it?'

He thought about this for a while.

'Not now. In any case, he had insufficient motive. And, as I said to you just now, if it had been Négrel, it could have been an accident, a mix-up over the phial.'

'Do you still think that's a possibility?'

'I'm afraid not.'

'Why?'

'Because Jave was already aware on Friday evening that his wife would be flying to Paris on the Saturday. He didn't come here to see Antoinette. He didn't miss the plane that Éveline was on. He quite deliberately took the plane to London, and I'm sure he knew the timetable in advance.'

The windows of his office were still lit up. Two or three times they saw a silhouette move across, probably Janvier, too wound up to stay sitting at Maigret's desk.

'Do you think that Doctor Jave had sufficient reason?'

'Doesn't what we've learned about Éveline provide sufficient

reason?'

'To kill her?'

He shrugged again.

'What I don't like,' he said reluctantly, 'was that he undressed her.'

'What do you mean?'

'It suggests that he wanted to cast suspicion on someone else.'

'Gilbert?'

'Yes. He thought that he was being clever. Yet, strange though it may seem, it is always the clever ones who get themselves caught. There are some foul crimes committed by some low-life hooligan or other or by some madman that remain unpunished. But a crime by an educated man – never. They try to foresee every eventuality, don't leave anything to chance. They fiddle with everything. And it is this fiddling, that over-attention to detail, that eventually proves their undoing.

'I am convinced that Jave was in the apartment opposite while his wife was with your fiancé.

'I don't know what she said to Négrel and, given what I've learned about him, I doubt that he will ever tell you either.'

'I'm sure he won't.'

'I wouldn't be surprised if she had told him that she had decided to get a divorce, or even to move in with him straight away.'

'Do you think she loved him?'

'At the very least she had to have a man just for herself. She'd been looking for one for so long. She'd been looking in vain since the age of fourteen ...'

'Was she unhappy?'

'I don't know. She clung on to him. She tore a button off his jacket.'

'I can't bear to imagine how it happened.'

'Me neither. Négrel decided to leave. Note that he left at five thirty, even though surgery hours were from two till six. Once he had gone, all Jave had to do was walk across the landing.'

'Stop now.'

'I don't need to go into the fine detail. I just want to point out that he undressed her afterwards and disposed of the clothes.'

'I understand. Please don't say any more. But what if they don't get it, up there?'

She raised her head towards the illuminated windows.

‘Why don’t you go in, inspector? Then it would all be over and done with. I’m sure that you ...’

It was after midnight. The street was deserted, as was Pont Saint-Michel. There were sounds in the distance, and Maigret could make out several people’s footsteps in the courtyard of the Police Judiciaire.

Martine stopped and automatically grabbed his arm.

‘What is it?’

He strained to hear, followed the direction of the footsteps. Finally he relaxed.

‘Someone being taken off to the cells.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘I recognize the creak of the gate.’

‘Jave?’

‘I suppose so.’

At that moment the lights went out in one of the windows, the one belonging to the inspectors’ room.

He pulled her back into even deeper shadow, and indeed a few moments later they saw Santoni, Lapointe and Bonfils emerge from the building. Lapointe and Santoni headed towards Pont Saint-Michel, and Bonfils towards Pont-Neuf.

‘See you tomorrow.’

‘Goodnight.’

‘It’s over,’ Maigret murmured.

‘Are you sure?’

‘Janvier is briefing the journalists. We’ll see them come out any time now.’

‘And the young woman, Antoinette?’

‘They’ll keep her in. It’s possible she’ll be charged with conspiracy, since she provided the doctor with an alibi.’

‘Her mother too?’

‘Probably.’

‘Do you think they knew?’

‘The thing is, my dear, it’s none of my business, because I’m on holiday. And even if I was in Janvier’s place, I wouldn’t hazard an opinion, because that’s for the jury to decide.’

‘Will they release Gilbert?’

‘Not until tomorrow morning, because only the examining magistrate is authorized to sign the necessary papers.’

‘Will he know by now?’

‘He must have realized he had some company in the cells, and I’d swear that he recognized the voices. What’s the matter?’

She had suddenly started crying, without knowing why.

‘I don’t even have a handkerchief …’ she stammered. ‘How stupid is that? What time tomorrow morning?’

‘Not before nine.’

He had given her his handkerchief and he was still keeping an eye on the entrance to the Police Judiciaire.

A car zoomed out, a grey car that must have belonged to one of the journalists, but there were five or six of them squashed inside. Two photographers came out on foot and headed for Pont-Neuf.

There was still a light on in Maigret’s office, but finally that was switched off too.

‘Come over here …’

They walked a short distance and found an even deeper area of shadow. They heard a car engine turning over inside the courtyard, and then one of the small black police cars emerged.

‘It’s OK. He’s on his own,’ Maigret said quietly.

‘Who?’

‘Janvier. If he hadn’t succeeded, he would have had Jave driven home or taken him home himself.’

The black car went off in turn towards Pont-Neuf.

‘So there we are, young lady. It’s all over.’

‘Thank you, inspector.’

‘For what?’

‘For everything.’

She seemed on the point of crying again. He walked with her towards Pont Saint-Michel.

‘No need to give me a lift. I live just opposite.’

‘I know. Goodnight.’

There was a café still open at Châtelet, and Maigret went inside, sat down at one of the tables in the almost empty room and slowly drank a beer. Then he took a taxi.

‘Boulevard Richard-Lenoir. I’ll tell you where to drop me.’

The boulevard was deserted. He couldn’t see any shadowy figures outside. As he climbed the last flight of stairs, the door opened, as usual, because Madame Maigret recognized his footsteps.

‘Well?’ she asked, her hair in curlers.

‘It’s over.’

‘Négrel?’

‘Jave.’

‘I would never have believed it.’

‘Did anyone come here?’

‘No.’

‘There weren’t any journalists hanging around when you came back?’

‘I was on the lookout. I’m sure.’

‘What day is it?’

‘Saturday. Or rather Sunday, as it’s one thirty in the morning.’

‘Would it be a nuisance to pack a case for a few days?’

‘When do you want to go?’

‘As soon as you are ready. If we leave it to the morning, we’ll be spotted.’

‘I need to fix my hair.’

It was 2.30, and the night was still and mild as they came downstairs, Maigret carrying the case that they used for their rare weekends away.

‘Where are you thinking of going?’

‘Anywhere with a vacancy. There must be an inn somewhere, not too far from Paris, where they have a room free.’

They drove along the Seine in a taxi, heading towards the forest of Fontainebleau. Just beyond Corbeil, Maigret remembered an inn at Morsang, where he had once stayed in the course of an investigation.

‘Are you going to wake them?’

He didn’t have a plan. He didn’t know what he was going to do. He was on holiday – properly this time.

He had been right to follow his lucky star, as he didn’t need to wake the people from the inn, whose closed shutters they could see in the moonlight. Next to the Seine, among the silvery reflections, a man was setting his eel pots, and Maigret recognized the innkeeper.

‘We do have a room free, but it’s booked from tomorrow evening.’

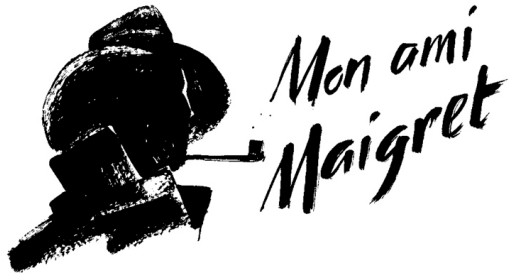
What did that matter? The next day they were free to try their luck further on.

As they waited for the innkeeper to wake his wife, they sat quietly on the terrace at an iron table, watching the river flow by.

It wasn’t until four days later, in an inn on the banks of the Loing, that Maigret received a postcard with a picture of Quai des Orfèvres. His name and address were written in block capitals, and

in the message part of the card there were just two words:

THANKS, CHIEF


Mon ami
Maigret

GEORGES
SIMENON
Maigret Travels
INSPECTOR MAIGRET

1.

What happened at the George-V while it was raining in Paris, Maigret was sleeping and a certain number of people were doing their best

‘The most troublesome cases are those that seem so commonplace at first that you don’t attach any importance to them. They’re a bit like those illnesses that start in a subdued way, with a vague sense of unease. By the time you finally take them seriously, it’s often too late.’

This was something Maigret had said to Inspector Janvier as they crossed Pont-Neuf on their way back to police headquarters on Quai des Orfèvres one evening.

But tonight, Maigret made no comment on the events currently unfolding, because he was fast asleep beside Madame Maigret in his apartment on Boulevard Richard-Lenoir.

If he had been anticipating trouble, he certainly wouldn’t have thought of the Hôtel George-V, a place more often talked about in the society pages of newspapers than in the local news, but of a deputy’s daughter he had been obliged to summon to his office and advise to refrain from further bad behaviour. Although he had spoken to her in a fatherly tone, she had taken it quite badly. True, she had only just turned eighteen.

‘You’re nothing but a civil servant, I’ll see to it that your career is ruined …’

By three in the morning, a fine drizzle was falling, which although barely visible still lacquered the streets and gave a sheen to the lights, like tears to eyes.

At 3.30, on the third floor of the George-V, a bell rang in the room where a chambermaid and a valet were dozing. They both opened their eyes, but the valet was the first to notice that the yellow light had come on.

‘It’s for Jules,’ he said.

That meant that someone had rung for the waiter, who set off to take a bottle of Danish beer to a customer.

The two servants dropped off to sleep again on their respective chairs. There was a relatively long silence, then the bell rang again just as Jules, who was over sixty and had always done the night shift, returned with his empty tray.

'Here goes!' he muttered between his teeth.

Unhurriedly, he headed for suite 332, where a light was on above the door, knocked, waited a moment and, hearing nothing, gently opened. There was nobody in the dark sitting room. A little light came from the bedroom, where a faint, continuous moaning, like that of an animal or a child, could be heard.

The little countess was lying on the bed, her eyes half closed, her lips slightly parted, both hands on her chest more or less where the heart was.

'Who is it?' she moaned.

'The waiter, countess.'

He knew her well. She knew him well, too.

'I'm dying, Jules. I don't want to. Call the doctor, quickly. Is there one in the hotel?'

'Not at this hour, countess, but I'll tell the nurse.'

Just over an hour earlier, he had brought a bottle of champagne, a bottle of whisky, some soda and an ice bucket to this same suite. The bottles and glasses were still in the sitting room, apart from one champagne glass that lay on the bedside table, tipped on its side.

'Hello? Get me the nurse, quickly!'

Unsurprised, Mademoiselle Rosay, the duty operator, inserted a plug in one of the switchboard's many sockets, then another.

Jules heard a distant ringing, then a sleepy voice.

'Hello, infirmary here.'

'Could you come down right away to suite 332?'

'I'm dying, Jules …'

'You're not going to die, countess.'

He wasn't sure what to do while waiting. Switching on the lamps in the sitting room, he noticed that the bottle of champagne was empty, whereas a quarter of the bottle of whisky was still untouched.

Countess Palmieri was still moaning, her hands taut on her chest.

'Jules …'

'Yes, countess?'

‘If they come too late …’

‘Mademoiselle Genévrier is on her way down now.’

‘But if they come too late, tell them I poisoned myself, but that I don’t want to die …’

The grey-haired, grey-faced nurse, whose body, beneath her white coat, still smelled of bed, entered the suite after tapping at the door for form’s sake. She was holding a brownish bottle of something or other in her hand, and her pockets were stuffed with boxes of pills.

‘She says she poisoned herself.’

Before anything else, Mademoiselle Genévrier looked around her, spotted the waste paper basket, took a tube from it and read the label.

‘Ask the switchboard operator to call Dr Frère. Say it’s urgent.’

Now that there was someone to take care of her, it was as if the countess were abandoning herself to her fate, making no further attempt to speak, her moaning growing fainter.

‘Hello? Call Dr Frère quickly. No, not me, the nurse is asking for him.’

Such things are so frequent, in luxury hotels and in some parts of Paris, that when the police emergency switchboard receives a call at night from the sixteenth arrondissement, for example, there is almost always someone who asks:

‘Barbiturates?’

It has become a generic name for this kind of suicide attempt.

‘Fetch me some hot water.’

‘Boiling?’

‘It doesn’t really matter, as long as it’s hot.’

Mademoiselle Genévrier had taken the countess’s pulse and lifted her eyelid.

‘How many pills did you take?’

‘I don’t know …’ she replied in a little girl’s voice. ‘I can’t remember … Don’t let me die …’

‘Of course not, my dear. Just drink this.’

An arm round her shoulders, she held a glass in front of her lips.

‘Is it bad?’

‘Drink.’

Not far away, on Avenue Marceau, Dr Frère hastily dressed and grabbed his bag. Soon afterwards, he left the sleeping building and got into his car, which was parked outside.

The marble lobby of the George-V was deserted apart from the night receptionist reading a newspaper behind his mahogany desk on one side and the porter doing nothing on the other.

'Suite 332,' the doctor said as he passed.

'I know.'

The switchboard operator had told him all about it.

'Shall I call an ambulance?'

'Let me see first.'

Dr Frère knew most of the hotel's suites. Like the nurse, he knocked more or less symbolically, then went in, took off his hat and headed straight for the bedroom.

After fetching a jug of hot water, Jules had withdrawn to a corner.

'She took something doctor. I gave her …'

They exchanged a few words, which were like shorthand or like a conversation in code, while the countess, still supported by the nurse, retched violently and began to vomit.

'Jules!'

'Yes, doctor.'

'Put a call through to the American Hospital in Neuilly and ask them to send an ambulance.'

There was nothing exceptional about any of this. The switchboard operator, headphones on her head, spoke to another night-shift operator over in Neuilly.

'I don't know for sure. It's Countess Palmieri. The doctor's upstairs with her now.'

The telephone rang in 332. Jules picked up the receiver.

'The ambulance will be here in ten minutes,' he announced.

Having just administered an injection, the doctor put the syringe back in his case.

'Shall I dress her?'

'Just wrap her in a blanket. If you see a suitcase anywhere, pack a few of her things. You know better than I do what she'll ask for.'

A quarter of an hour later, two male nurses took the little countess downstairs and put her in the ambulance, while Dr Frère got back in his car.

'I'll get there the same time as you …'

He knew the nurses. The nurses knew him. He also knew the hospital's switchboard operator, with whom he had a few words, as well as the young doctor on duty. These people, too, spoke little

and in a kind of code, used as they were to working together.

'Room 41 is free.'

'How many pills?'

'She can't remember. The tube was found empty.'

'Has she vomited?'

This nurse was as familiar to Dr Frère as the one at the George-V. As she got down to work, he at last lit a cigarette.

Pumping of the stomach. Taking of the pulse. Another injection.

'All we can do now is let her sleep. Take her pulse every half hour.'

'Yes, doctor.'

He went back down in a lift just like the one in the hotel and gave some instructions to the receptionist, who wrote them down.

'Have you informed the police?'

'Not yet.'

He looked at the black and white clock. 4.30.

'Put me through to the police station in Rue de Berry.'

There were bicycles outside the door of the station, under the lamp. Inside, two young officers were playing cards, and a sergeant was making coffee on a spirit lamp.

'Hello, Rue de Berry station … Dr What? … Frère? … All right, go ahead … Just a moment …'

The sergeant grabbed a pencil and noted down what he was being told on a scrap of paper.

'Yes … Yes … I'll tell them you'll be sending your report … Is she dead?'

He hung up and said to the other two, who had been watching him:

'Barbiturates. George-V …'

As far as he was concerned, it was just one more chore. With a sigh, he picked up the receiver again.

'Central switchboard? … Rue de Berry station here … Is that you, Marchal? How are things over there? … Pretty quiet here … The fight? … No, we didn't keep them. One of them has a lot of contacts, if you know what I mean. I had to phone the chief inspector, and he told me to let them go.'

The fight he was referring to had taken place in a nightclub in Rue de Ponthieu.

'Anyway, I have something else. Barbiturates. Are you taking this down? … Countess … Yes, a countess … Whether she's a real one

or not, I have no idea … Palmieri … P for Paul, A for Arthur, L for Léon, M for … Palmieri, yes … Hôtel George-V … Suite 332 … Dr Frère … American Hospital in Neuilly … Yes, she did say something. She wanted to die, and then she changed her mind. The usual story …'

At 5.30, Inspector Justin of the eighth arrondissement questioned the night porter of the George-V, made a few notes, then spoke to Jules, the waiter, after which he headed for the hospital in Neuilly, where he was told that the countess was asleep and that her life was no longer in danger.

At eight in the morning, it was still drizzling, but the sky was clear. Lucas, who had a slight cold, took his seat behind his desk at Quai des Orfèvres, ready to look through the night's reports.

Here, couched in bureaucratic language, was mention of the fight in Rue de Ponthieu, a dozen prostitutes arrested, a few drunks, a knife attack in Rue de Flandre and a few other incidents, none of them out of the ordinary.

Six lines also informed him of the suicide attempt by Countess Palmieri, née La Salle.

Maigret arrived at nine, somewhat anxious about the deputy's daughter.

'Has the chief asked for me?'

'Not yet.'

'Anything important in the reports?'

Lucas hesitated for a moment, came to the conclusion that an attempted suicide, even one at the George-V, was of no great importance and replied:

'No, nothing.'

He had no inkling that in doing so he was making a serious mistake, one that would cause complications for Maigret and the whole of the Police Judiciaire.

When the bell rang in the corridor, Maigret left his office, carrying a few files, and, along with the other department heads, made his way to the commissioner's office. Here, the cases currently being handled by the various chief inspectors were discussed, but since he knew nothing about her, Maigret did not mention Countess Palmieri.

By ten, he was back in his office. His pipe in his mouth, he began his report on an armed robbery that had occurred three days earlier, the perpetrators of which he was hoping to arrest very soon

thanks to an Alpine beret left at the scene.

At about the same time, a man named John T. Arnold, having his breakfast in pyjamas and dressing gown in his room at the Hôtel Scribe, on the Grands Boulevards, picked up the telephone.

'Hello, mademoiselle. Could you please get me Colonel Ward at the Hôtel George-V?'

'Right away, Monsieur Arnold.'

Monsieur Arnold was a long-standing guest who lived at the Scribe virtually all year.

The switchboard operators at the Scribe and the George-V knew each other, as operators do, even though they had never met.

'Morning, dear, can you get me Colonel Ward?'

'Is it for Arnold?'

The two men were in the habit of calling each other several times a day, and the ten a.m. telephone call was a tradition.

'He hasn't rung for his breakfast yet. Shall I call him anyway?'

'Wait. I'll ask my man.'

The plug passed from one socket to another.

'Monsieur Arnold? … The colonel hasn't rung for his breakfast yet. Shall I get them to wake him?'

'Has he left a message?'

'They didn't tell me anything.'

'It is ten o'clock, isn't it?'

'Ten past ten.'

'Call him.'

The plug again.

'Ring him, dear. Too bad if he grumbles …'

Silence on the line. The switchboard operator at the Scribe had time to put through three other calls, including one from Amsterdam.

'Are you still there, dear? Don't forget my colonel.'

'I keep ringing him. He doesn't answer.'

A few moments later, the Scribe called the George-V.

'Listen, dear. I told my man the colonel isn't answering. He says it's not possible, the colonel is expecting his ten o'clock call, apparently it's very important.'

'I'll ring him again …'

Then, after another vain attempt:

'Wait a minute. I'll ask the porter if he's gone out.'

A silence.

‘No, his key isn’t in the rack. What do you want me to do?’

In his suite, John T. Arnold was getting impatient.

‘Well, mademoiselle? Have you forgotten my call?’

‘No, Monsieur Arnold. The colonel isn’t answering. The porter hasn’t seen him go out, and his key isn’t in the rack.’

‘Let them send the waiter to knock at his door.’

It wasn’t Jules this time, but an Italian named Gino, who had taken over on the third floor, where Colonel Ward’s suite was located, five doors down from Countess Palmieri’s.

The waiter called the porter back.

‘There’s no answer, and the door’s locked.’

The porter turned to his assistant.

‘Go and have a look.’

The assistant now also knocked, saying in a low voice:

‘Colonel Ward?’

Then he took a skeleton key from his pocket and opened the door.

In the suite, the shutters were closed, and a lamp was still lit on a table in the sitting room. The lights were also on in the bedroom, the bed made up for the night, the pyjamas laid out.

‘Colonel Ward?’

There were dark clothes on a chair, socks on the carpet, and a pair of shoes, one of them upside down, showing the heel.

‘Colonel Ward!’

The bathroom door was ajar. The porter’s assistant first knocked, then opened the door and simply said:

‘Monsieur!’

He almost telephoned from the room, but was so reluctant to stay there that he preferred to leave the suite, closing the door behind him. Neglecting the lift, he ran down the stairs.

Three or four guests were standing around the porter, who was looking through a transatlantic plane schedule for them. His assistant whispered in his ear:

‘He’s dead.’

‘One moment …’ Then, only now grasping the words he had just heard: ‘What do you mean?’

‘Dead … In his bath …’

The porter asked the guests, in English, to wait a minute. He crossed the lobby and leaned across the reception desk.

‘Is Monsieur Gilles in his office?’

The receptionist nodded. The porter went and knocked at a door in the left-hand corner.

'Excuse me, Monsieur Gilles. I just had René go up to the colonel's suite. Apparently, he's dead in his bath …'

Monsieur Gilles was wearing striped trousers and a black cheviot jacket. He turned to his secretary.

'Call Dr Frère immediately. He must be busy doing his rounds. See if he can be reached …'

Monsieur Gilles knew things of which the police were as yet unaware. So did the porter, Monsieur Albert.

'What do you think, Albert?'

'The same as you, I guess.'

'You heard about the countess?'

A nod of the head sufficed.

'I'm going up.'

But, as he had no desire to go alone, he chose one of the young men in morning coat and slicked-back hair from reception to accompany him. Passing the porter, who had resumed his usual place, he said to him:

'Ask the nurse to come down to 347 immediately.'

The lobby was not empty, as it had been during the night. The three Americans were still discussing which plane to take. A couple who had just arrived were filling in their form at reception. The florist was at her post, as were the newspaper seller and the employee who handled theatre tickets. A few people sat waiting in armchairs, among them the senior sales assistant from a well-known dress shop with a box full of dresses.

Upstairs, standing by the bathroom door in suite 347, the manager did not dare look at the colonel's obese body, which lay curiously in the bath, the head underwater, only the belly emerging.

'Get me the—'

He changed his mind when he heard the telephone ringing in the next room. He rushed to it.

'Monsieur Gilles?'

It was the switchboard operator's voice.

'I reached Dr Frère as he was visiting a patient in Rue François-Ier. He'll be here in a few minutes.'

'Who am I supposed to be calling?' the young man from reception asked.

The police, obviously. There was no getting away from them in situations like this. But although Monsieur Gilles knew the local chief inspector, the two men didn't get on well. Plus, the local police sometimes behaved with a tactlessness that ill suited a hotel like the George-V.

'Get me the Police Judiciaire.'

'Who shall I ask for?'

'The commissioner.'

They had met several times at dinners, and although they had only exchanged a few words, that was enough of an introduction.

'Hello? Is that the commissioner? … I'm sorry to disturb you, Monsieur Benoit. Gilles here, manager of the George-V. Something has just … I mean, I've just discovered …'

He no longer knew how to come out with it.

'Unfortunately, this is a very important figure we're talking about, someone known around the world … Colonel Ward … That's right, David Ward … One of the members of my staff just found him dead in his bath … No, that's all I know. I thought it best to call you immediately … I'm expecting the doctor any moment now … I don't need to tell you that this requires …'

Discretion, of course. He had no desire to see reporters and photographers besieging the hotel.

'No … No, of course not. I promise we won't touch a thing. I'll stay in the suite in person … Ah, here's Dr Frère. Would you like to speak to him?'

The doctor, who as yet knew nothing, took the receiver that was held out to him.

'Dr Frère speaking … Yes … I was with a patient and have only just arrived … What's that? … I can't say he's a patient of mine, but I know him … I did once treat him for a mild bout of flu … What? Oh, no, very robust, in spite of the life he leads – led, I should say … I'm sorry, I haven't yet seen the body … Of course … Yes … Yes … I understand … Good day, commissioner … Would you like to speak to him again? … No?'

He hung up.

'Where is he?'

'In the bath.'

'The commissioner asks that nothing be touched until he's sent someone.'

Monsieur Gilles turned to the young receptionist.

‘You can go down now. Keep an eye open for the people from the police and make sure they come up discreetly. And no chatting about this in the lobby, please … Have you got that?’

‘Yes, monsieur.’

The telephone rang in Maigret’s office.

‘Could you come and see me for a moment?’

It was the third time Maigret had been disturbed since he had started his report on the armed robbery. He relit the pipe he had let go out, walked down the corridor and knocked at the commissioner’s door.

‘Come in, Maigret. Sit down.’

Rays of sunlight were starting to mingle with the rain, and there were some on the commissioner’s brass ashtray.

‘Do you know Colonel Ward?’

‘I’ve read his name in the papers. He’s the one who’s been married three or four times, isn’t he?’

‘He’s just been found dead in his bath at the George-V.’

Absorbed as he was by the case of the armed robbery, Maigret did not react.

‘I think it best if you go there yourself. The doctor, who’s more or less attached to the hotel, has just told me that the colonel was still in excellent health yesterday and that as far as he knows he never suffered from heart problems … The press are bound to get hold of it, not just the French press, the foreign papers, too.’

Maigret hated these cases involving well-known people, cases that needed to be handled with kid gloves.

‘I’m on my way,’ he said.

Once again, his report would have to wait. Grouchily, he opened the door to the inspectors’ room, wondering who to take with him. Janvier was there, but he, too, was busy with the armed robbery.

‘Go to my office and try to carry on with my report … Lapointe!’

Young Lapointe looked up, clearly pleased.

‘Get your hat. You’re coming with me.’

Then, to Lucas:

‘If anyone asks for me, I’ll be at the George-V.’

‘Is it about the attempted suicide?’

Having blurted it out without thinking, Lucas turned red.

‘What attempted suicide?’

‘The countess …’ Lucas stammered.

‘What are you talking about?’

‘There was something in this morning’s reports about a countess with an Italian name who tried to kill herself at George-V. The only reason I didn’t tell you—’

‘Where’s the report?’

Lucas searched through the papers heaped on his desk and pulled out an official sheet.

‘She isn’t dead. That’s why …’

Maigret skimmed through a few lines.

‘Has anyone questioned her?’

‘I don’t know. Someone from the eighth arrondissement went to the hospital in Neuilly. I don’t yet know if she’s in a fit state to speak.’

What Maigret didn’t know was that, the night before, just before two in the morning, Countess Palmieri and Colonel David Ward had got out of a taxi outside the George-V, and the porter hadn’t been surprised to see them coming to collect their keys together.

Nor had Jules, the floor waiter, been surprised when, called to the countess’s suite, number 332, he had found the colonel there.

‘The usual, Jules!’ the colonel had said.

That meant a bottle of Krug 1947 and an unopened bottle of Johnny Walker: the colonel didn’t trust whisky he hadn’t opened himself.

Lucas, who had been expecting a reprimand, was even more mortified when Maigret looked at him with a surprised air, as if such a lack of judgement, coming from his longest-standing colleague, was impossible to believe.

‘Come with me, Lapointe!’

They passed a petty crook Maigret had summoned.

‘Come back this afternoon.’

‘What time, chief?’

‘Whenever you like.’

‘Shall I take a car?’ Lapointe asked.

They chose a car, and Lapointe took the wheel. At the George-V, the doorman had his instructions.

‘Leave it. I’ll park it.’

Everyone had instructions. As the two police officers advanced, the door opened, and in the twinkling of an eye they found themselves at the door of suite 347. The manager, informed of their arrival, was waiting for them.

Maigret hadn’t often had occasion to work at the George-V, but

he had nevertheless been called there two or three times and he knew Monsieur Gilles, whose hand he shook. Doctor Frère was in the sitting room, waiting by the pedestal table, on which he had placed his instrument case. He was a calm, pleasant man with a long list of patients, a man who knew almost as many secrets as Maigret himself. Only, he moved in a different world, one the police rarely had occasion to enter.

'Dead?'

He nodded.

'About what time?'

'We'll only know for certain after the post mortem, if, as I assume, a post mortem is ordered.'

'Couldn't it have been an accident?'

'Come and see …'

Maigret was no happier than Monsieur Gilles at the sight of the naked body in the bath.

'I haven't moved him. There was no point, medically speaking. At first sight, it could have been one of those accidents that happen more often in baths than you might think. Someone slips, his head hits the edge …'

'I know. Only, that doesn't leave any marks on the shoulders. Is that what you meant?'

Like the doctor, Maigret had noticed two darker patches, similar to bruises, on the dead man's shoulders.

'You think he was helped, is that it?'

'I don't know. I'd rather the pathologist pronounced on that.'

'When did you last see him alive?'

'About a week ago, when I came to give the countess an injection.'

Monsieur Gilles' face clouded over. Had he been hoping to avoid the matter of the countess coming up?

'A countess with an Italian name?'

'Countess Palmieri.'

'The one who tried to commit suicide last night?'

'To be honest, I'm not sure it was a serious attempt. It's true she took barbiturates. In fact, I knew she used them regularly at night. She took a larger than usual dose, but I doubt she ingested enough of them to cause death.'

'A fake suicide, in other words?'

'That's what I'm wondering.'

They were both accustomed to women – almost always pretty women! – who, after a quarrel, a disappointment, a love affair, take just enough sleeping pills to present the symptoms of poisoning, but without putting their lives in danger.

'You say the colonel was present when you gave the countess an injection?'

'Whenever she was in Paris, I'd give her two a week. Vitamins B and C. It wasn't anything serious. Over-exertion … if you know what I mean.'

'And the colonel?'

Monsieur Gilles preferred to answer this question himself.

'The colonel and the countess were very close. They each had their own suite, I always wondered why, because—'

'Was he her lover?'

'It was an open secret, you might almost say it was official. About two years ago, unless I'm mistaken, the colonel asked his wife for a divorce and, in their set, it was expected that once he was free he would marry the countess.'

Maigret almost asked, with false naivety:

'What set is that?'

But what was the point? The telephone rang, and Lapointe looked at his chief to know what to do. It was obvious that he was overawed by the surroundings.

'Answer it.'

'Hello? … What? … Yes, he's here … That's right, it's me.'

'Who is it?' Maigret asked.

'Lucas would like a word.'

'Hello, Lucas.'

To make up for the morning's blunder, Lucas had got in touch with the American Hospital in Neuilly.

'I'm sorry, chief. I'll never forgive myself. Has she come back to the hotel?'

Having been left alone in her room, Countess Palmieri had got up and walked out of the hospital without anyone thinking of stopping her.

Pietr the Latvian
The Late Monsieur Gallet
The Hanged Man of Saint-Pholien
The Carter of *La Providence*
The Yellow Dog
Night at the Crossroads
A Crime in Holland
The Grand Banks Café
A Man's Head
The Dancer at the Gai-Moulin
The Two-Penny Bar
The Shadow Puppet
The Saint-Fiacre Affair
The Flemish House
The Madman of Bergerac
The Misty Harbour
Liberty Bar
Lock No. 1
Maigret
Cécile is Dead
The Cellars of the Majestic
The Judge's House
Signed, Picpus
Inspector Cadaver
Félicie
Maigret Gets Angry
Maigret in New York
Maigret's Holiday
Maigret and His Dead Man
Maigret's First Case
My Friend Maigret

Maigret at the Coroner's
Maigret and the Old Lady
Madame Maigret's Friend
Maigret's Memoirs
Maigret at Picratt's
Maigret Takes a Room
Maigret and the Tall Woman
Maigret, Lognon and the Gangsters
Maigret's Revolver
Maigret and the Man on the Bench
Maigret is Afraid
Maigret's Mistake
Maigret Goes to School
Maigret and the Dead Girl
Maigret and the Minister
Maigret and the Headless Corpse
Maigret Sets a Trap
Maigret's Failure
Maigret Enjoys Himself
Maigret Travels
Maigret has Doubts
Maigret and the Reluctant Witness
Maigret's Secret
Maigret in Court
Maigret and the Old People
Maigret and the Lazy Burglar
Maigret and the Good People of Montparnasse
Maigret and the Saturday Caller
Maigret and the Tramp
Maigret's Fury
Maigret and the Ghost

THE BEGINNING

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